

Journeying Toward a Praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy:

Lessons From Our Sweetgrass Baskets

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative inquiry explored the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, an Indigenous women-centred approach, to consider the effects this unique teaching and learning engagement had on the cultural identity development, holistic well-being, academic success, and community engagement of Indigenous women. Through Indigenous Maternal Methodology, I worked closely with an Elder to implement a series of sharing circles to gather the narratives of Indigenous women who had completed one or more of the classes where Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy was enacted. I connect Maternal Pedagogies with Indigenous epistemologies that embrace the “whole student” within educational contexts. Thus, Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy extends Maternal Pedagogies by drawing from an Indigenous women-centred worldview to establish a teaching and learning environment that can speak to the hearts and minds of students. In the spirit of reconciliation, I position this environment as a safe space where students can be their whole authentic selves and where their realities and lived experiences are positioned as strengths and key assets to establishing an ethical space for cross-cultural and anti-racist dialogue. My final chapter extends Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy to all students and includes a section that aligns this teaching praxis with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s (2016) Calls to Action in the spirit of advancing safe Homeplaces for all learners, educators, and scholars to become involved in reconciliation.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
CHAPTER 1: SETTING OUT	1
Tracing my Steps: Looking Back on my Decolonizing Journey	4
The Gidayaamin Indigenous Women's Certificate Program	7
Maternal Pedagogies	9
Presenting an Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy	12
Overview of Study	15
Research Questions	18
Background	21
Rationale.....	25
Outline of the Document	30
CHAPTER 2: CLEARING THE PATH.....	34
A Historical Context of Indigenous Women's Realities in Canada.....	34
Framing the Push for Indigenous Education	36
Indigenous Women's Educational Access and Success.....	40
Theoretical Foundations of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy.....	42
Associated Theoretical Perspectives	48
Connecting the Literature to Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy.....	67
Chapter Summary.....	71
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	72
Indigenous Maternal Methodology	74
Why Indigenous Maternal Methodology?.....	78
Indigenous Storytelling Methodology.....	81

Critical Race-Gendered Epistemology.....	84
Pilot Study	87
Restatement of Research Questions	90
Research Methods	92
Participant Profiles	106
Ethical Considerations.....	111
Chapter Summary.....	115
PEDAGOGICAL LESSONS OF THE SWEETGRASS TEACHINGS	118
CHAPTER 4: GATHERING THE SWEETGRASS	125
Resilience: Indigenous Women’s Journeys to and Within University.....	126
Educational Barriers and Disruptions	136
Education as “The New Buffalo”	144
The Sweetgrass Has Been Gathered.....	158
CHAPTER 5: WEAVING THE BASKETS AND GATHERING MEDICINES	160
Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy	160
Foundation for Indigenous-Centred Learning and Success	196
Transformative Learning.....	205
The Medicines Have Been Gathered.....	214
CHAPTER 6: CARRYING THE BASKETS HOME AND PLANTING SEEDS	215
Cultural Identity	216
Community Involvement and Giving Back to Community	232
Well-Being	242
The Seeds Have Been Planted.....	258
THE GIVEAWAY: LESSONS OF THE SWEETGRASS BASKETS	260
CHAPTER 7: SWEETGRASS IS ALL AROUND HER.....	272

Summary of Research Findings	276
Carrying the Lessons Forward	282
The Three Links: Epistemology, Methodology, and Pedagogy	283
Advancing Indigenous Maternal Methodology.....	285
My Praxis—A Living Connection Between Theory and Practice	288
Connecting With Other Empowered Communities	293
Chapter Summary.....	297
CHAPTER 8: AN EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY TOWARD RECONCILIATION	299
Applying Sweetgrass Lessons to Truth and Reconciliation.....	302
Lesson Plan—Reconciliation Involves Everyone	304
Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a Response to the TRC’s Calls to Action.....	308
Final Reflection	309
Concluding Remarks	314
References	316
Appendix A: Sharing Circle Discussion Guide	330
Appendix B: Initial Themes Prepared for Feedback Circle.....	334

CHAPTER 1: SETTING OUT

She:kon, Jennifer Brant Ionkiats. Kenhté:ke nitewaké:non tanon Kanien'kehá:ka ni' ni:'i. Wakeniáhton ó:ni tekeni tehniyáhsen wakeksátayen. [Hello, my name is Jennifer Brant. I am from the Mohawk Nation—The People of the Flint—and have family ties to Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory and Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. I am a mother of two boys.] In honour of Haudenosaunee ways of contextualizing knowledge, it is important that I begin by introducing myself in *Kanien'kéha* [the Mohawk language or the language of the People of the Flint].

In my tradition, as I have come to understand it, this introduction is about honouring my ancestors who support me throughout my learning journey. Within Indigenous¹ contexts, this introduction is also about relationship building and connecting with others whose paths I cross. Here, and in other pieces of writing, it allows readers to understand something about my cultural identity that should be considered in what follows. Within an academic context, this opening is my opportunity to position myself within the work that I do as an aspiring Indigenous scholar. As a graduate student, I have approached all of my writing in this manner because I consider my work to be inseparable from my identity as a *Yakonkwehón:we* [Mohawk woman] and *Ista* [mother] of two children. This form of relationship building is important and should always be established when one is conducting research in Indigenous contexts.

¹ Throughout this document, I use the terms Indigenous, Aboriginal, and Native somewhat interchangeably. I use the terms used by other scholars when referencing their work. Although many of the terms used to describe or define Indigenous people have specific political associations, some of them are also terms that have become familiar and are entrenched within understandings of cultural identity. Using the three terms interchangeably not only connects Indigenous people from their many varied Nations across Canada, and in some cases around the globe, but also captures the complexity of life experiences.

As a doctoral student I made a commitment to conceptualize my experience throughout the program as a decolonizing journey. Thus, I have approached all of my coursework and academic engagements through a decolonizing lens that is inspired by the work of many Indigenous scholars noted throughout this dissertation. In particular, Dr. Marie Battiste's (1998, 2013) work has inspired my commitment to approach this study as a decolonizing journey that nourishes my own learning spirit. Battiste (2013) describes the tension that characterized my experiences as I worked within a mainstream program:

This imperialistic system of knowledge that is considered the “mainstream” functions like a “keeper” current in a rapidly flowing river or ocean. The keeper current drags a person to the bottom and then to the top, but if one fights against the current one usually drowns. Decolonization then is a process of unpacking the keeper current in education: its powerful Eurocentric assumptions of education, its narratives of race and difference in curriculum and pedagogy, its establishing culturalism or cultural racism as a justification for the status quo, and the advocacy for Indigenous knowledge as a legitimate education topic. (p. 107)

In *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*, Battiste (2013) captures the paradox of mainstream education as it is experienced by Indigenous students. In her earlier (1998) work, she noted that Indigenous students are looking to liberate themselves and their communities through education, yet they are faced with a strenuous curriculum and often experience a “fragmented existence” (p. 24). This has indeed been my experience as I have continuously resisted the “keeper current” of mainstream education. By working through this decolonizing lens that not only resists

Eurocentric assumptions, values, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies, but also reclaims Indigenous worldviews to nourish my own learning spirit, I have been able to develop a unique program of study for myself that is culturally relevant and suits my needs as an emerging Indigenous scholar.

The current research is irrevocably intertwined with my cultural identity as a *Yakonkwehón:we* and *Ista*. It is inspired by my own educational narrative along with the narratives of the women who participated in my Master of Education (MEd) research, and the students who I have had the opportunity to teach over the past few years. Thus, I am personally invested in the work I do as a doctoral scholar. My commitment to ensure the outcomes of my research are meaningful and beneficial to Indigenous communities is an extension of my personal investment. My own educational narrative involves coming to know the work of Indigenous women scholars who have cleared the pathway of my decolonizing journey through academia. I am grateful and honoured to follow their footsteps as I continue by humbly clearing the way for others. For me, clearing this path is about inspiring others as I have been inspired through scholarship that I define as Indigenous and maternal. I believe that education that promotes cultural identity and ensures holistic support for Indigenous learners is essential to Indigenous community well-being (J. Brant, 2014b). For Indigenous women specifically, the first teachers of future generations, there is an immediate need for holistic and culturally relevant educational opportunities that honour their roles as mothers, students, and community members (J. Brant, 2011). This research, therefore, explores my praxis through what I call Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. I strive to relate my teaching practice to cultural identity development and holistic support to promote Indigenous women's academic

success and community involvement. In this research, I capture key aspects of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as I have attempted to enact it in my courses. I draw from sharing circles (group conversations with former students), conversations with an Elder (Grandmother Shirley) who provided maternal and cultural support during the sharing circles and the overall research project, and my ongoing research journal.

Tracing my Steps: Looking Back on my Decolonizing Journey

My decolonizing journey in academia began to take shape while I was in the MEd program. That earlier graduate student experience had a significant influence on my current scholarly directions. Thus, I describe my MEd research to bring clarity to the first steps of my research journey.

My previous research endeavour for my MEd thesis (J. Brant, 2011) focused on the barriers that Indigenous women face in access to and success within university institutions. Given the nature of my MEd research, it was important that I also located myself within the study to build rapport and gain connectivity with Indigenous communities and the readers of my research. Cree/Métis scholar Kim Anderson (2000) writes about the importance of self-locating especially when writing about Indigenous women who have been historically objectified and over scrutinized through colonial or outsider research. As Anderson explains, “too often in the past, Native peoples have been misrepresented and appropriated on the page by outsiders” (p. 40). My positionality within the research stemmed from my own experiences as an Indigenous woman and single mother of two young children. My work was closely tied to my personal experiences of balancing the above roles along with my role as a student. My success in university was, and continues to be, dependent on a myriad of support services that are

not easily accessible and often leave Indigenous women in vulnerable positions atypical of mainstream university students (Kenny, 2006; Native Women's Association of Canada [NWAC], 2009). Examples of support services that women in my MEd research identified as limited and unfeasible include childcare, housing, funding, and culturally relevant student services (J. Brant, 2011). Because of my own lived experiences, I have a deep understanding—an insider perspective—of many of the struggles and triumphs of Indigenous women in education. For example, I can relate to other Indigenous women who are resiliently balancing their roles and responsibilities as mothers, community members, and students, and often doing so “singlehandedly and in situations of poverty” (NWAC, 2009, p. 1). This understanding has not only strengthened my research, but also provided me with a meaningful educational opportunity as my personal ties allowed for a deep connection with the women who participated in my master's research and shared their narratives to inform and inspire educational change.

My master's research involved a two-phased approach implemented through the Wildfire Research Method, which is an Indigenous research method that is culturally aligned and akin to a sharing circle where participants come together to engage in a guided discussion (Kompf & Hodson, 2000). According to this method, sharing circles bring everyone together as equal participants regardless of social status or power relations and are often guided by an Elder and ceremonial protocol. For my master's research, I held two Wildfire Gatherings to identify barriers that Indigenous women face with educational access and success, and to envision a holistic support system that would meet the specific needs and educational realities of Indigenous women. The first gathering, Wildfire Gathering 1, brought together 16 frontline workers and professionals who met

the criteria as “Experts in the Fields.” This group represented six sectors (Childcare, Housing, Funding, Academic Support, Cultural Education, and Cultural Student Support) that I deemed to be essential to Indigenous women’s educational access and success, yet found to be fragmented and disconnected. Bringing this group together offered a holistic forum to consider how each service intersected to actually hinder educational access and success for Indigenous women. In addition, it brought a wealth of knowledge together so that seamless approaches and viable solutions could be discussed. The second gathering, Wildfire Gathering 2, brought together 4 Indigenous women who were either pursuing or intending to pursue undergraduate degrees. The purpose of Wildfire Gathering 2 was for the women to share their educational narratives, discuss the barriers they faced, and put forth a vision for programming that responded to their realities and educational desires as Indigenous women (J. Brant, 2011).

My MEd research served as an opportunity to inspire educational change through the expressed vision of Indigenous women. I contextualized the experiences of Indigenous women through historical, colonial, socio-cultural, and political analyses of the factors that shape their everyday experiences. I positioned the realities of Indigenous women in education through a strength-based view that recognizes the cultural knowledge, resilience, and lived experiences that students bring to their classrooms. Moreover, I placed emphasis on the importance of community knowledge and intercultural relationships in supporting and encouraging the development of strong cultural identities and educational success (J. Brant, 2011). I put forth the vision for the Gidayaamin Indigenous Women’s Certificate (Gidayaamin) program as a direct response to the women’s narratives.

The Gidayaamin Indigenous Women's Certificate Program

The Gidayaamin Indigenous Women's Certificate Program (identified here as Gidayaamin) was designed to offer transition support and assist Indigenous women in overcoming academic, cultural, and linguistic barriers that affect their access to and success within university. The program was embedded within a culturally relevant holistic system of support to assist Indigenous women in achieving their full academic potential. Thus, the program was designed to honour and support the childcare and family responsibilities of the students. Moreover, the Indigenous content design ensured the cultural and traditional realities of the students were reflected in all aspects of the program. The program included curriculum that focused on decolonizing and reclaiming Indigenous women's identities. Course activities prompted students to apply cultural knowledges and traditions within modern contexts and included conversations on contemporary realities for Indigenous families. Thus, learning outcomes encouraged balance between traditional and academic worldviews that were culturally relevant and aligned with the educational visions expressed by the women who participated in my master's research as described above.

On April 13, 2011, the Senate of Brock University approved the proposal for the Gidayaamin program. The first group of women to enrol in the program began their studies in September 2011 and all four of them graduated in October 2012. By the second year, enrollment in the program had more than doubled. The fifth cohort of women graduated from the program in October 2016. Graduates of the program have moved on

to complete undergraduate degrees and have secured meaningful positions at local Indigenous community organizations.²

As a direct response to the educational needs and desires that were expressed by the participants in my MEd research (J. Brant, 2011), the development of Gidayaamin served as a model of the connection between Indigenous research and practice as well as the connection between Indigenous research and community well-being. Women who have completed the program have shared their success stories with me, which influenced my desire to dig deeper and continue gathering Indigenous women's educational narratives.

This overview of my MEd research and the Gidayaamin program is an important component of this introduction to this dissertation because it encompasses the foundation of my present research journey toward the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. My MEd served as an opportunity to begin working on the development of Gidayaamin, which aligned with the expressed vision of the participants of my MEd research. It was during the development phase of Gidayaamin that I began to enact Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, although I had not named it at the time. Below, I describe my development of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy by first acknowledging the overall field of Maternal Pedagogies.

My first formal teaching experience was in 2011 when I began teaching the Indigenous women's literature course INDG 2P17 *Reclaiming Indigenous Women's Literary Traditions and Educational Aspirations*, which was developed for Gidayaamin. I

² The Gidayaamin program was funded through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities for five years. Once the funding period ended, the Tecumseh Centre changed the name of the program to the Gidayaamin Indigenous Transition Program and removed the women-centred courses in hopes to attract more students and move towards self-sustainability.

enacted Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy in this course as well as in the development of the other women-centred course INDG 2F14 *Decolonizing Indigenous Women's Identities* and the overall vision of Gidayaamin. I have since had the opportunity to develop and teach new Indigenous studies courses that are open to all students where I also enact Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. Although my development and articulation of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy did not come until after I began my doctoral studies, the initial seeds were planted during my MEd research, which had a strong emphasis on cultural identity development for Indigenous women as informed by Anderson (2000). It has been seven years since I completed that initial research and this current work in many ways seeks to see how my responses to the expressed vision of the participants of my MEd research, as the Gidayaamin program developer and course instructor, have been received by new groups of Indigenous women students. This previous work has undoubtedly influenced and shaped my understanding and delivery of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. The following section, however, also credits my earlier educational experiences in the undergraduate and graduate courses where I learned about Maternal Pedagogies.

Maternal Pedagogies

As an undergraduate student, I took a women's studies course on mothering and motherhood. As a young mother at the time, this course had a profound impact on my educational experience. The course text *Redefining Motherhood: Changing Identities and Patterns* (Abbey & O'Reilly, 1998) advanced my understandings of "Maternal Epistemology," which they defined with respect "to know[ing], understand[ing] or claim[ing] a particular authority and knowledge based on experiences of mothering" (p. 330). A few years later, in the MEd program, I enrolled in a course on Gendering

Educational Histories and the required text *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings* (O'Reilly, 2007) presented Maternal Pedagogies within educational contexts. As O'Reilly (2007) explained in the introduction to the reader, “the chapters theorize motherhood from three perspectives: motherhood as experience/role, motherhood as institution/ideology, and motherhood as identity/subjectivity” (p. 2). For example, chapters on Indigenous ideologies of motherhood, queer mothering, the sociology of gender, radical parenting, the right to mothering, the paradox of natural mothering, and transnational adoption, are a sample of the many perspectives included in the reader that challenge essentialist notions of Maternal Pedagogies. As I explain below, both of these courses were delivered through Maternal Pedagogy and my experiences in the courses were distinct from my experiences in other courses. I believe these courses planted early pedagogical seeds that influenced my interest in this area of scholarship and shaped my current teaching approaches.

Over the past few years, I have become quite familiar with Maternal Pedagogies through my membership with the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement (MIRCI) founded by Andrea O'Reilly. MIRCI is a scholarly and activist organization dedicated to the work of mothering and motherhood studies. MIRCI is partnered with Demeter Press, which is a feminist press on motherhood studies and houses the *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative*. MIRCI also hosts academic conferences on various topics associated with motherhood studies. Although maternal pedagogies are not new to the study or application of education, they are becoming more popular through motherhood studies and the work of MIRCI. Through MIRCI, Demeter Press has published a number of anthologies that present Maternal Pedagogies within different

social, historical, cultural, and political contexts. One in particular, *Maternal Pedagogies: In and Outside the Classroom* (Byrd & Green, 2011) is a collection of essays that examines the relationship between mothering, teaching, and learning. The following questions explored in the collection are useful to my own exploration of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy:

Are there “maternal” ways of constructing and transmitting knowledge and if so, how do these vary according to factors such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual identity, nationality, and/or (dis)ability? What kinds of teacher–student relationships characterize the interactions of a given group of mothers and the children they’re rearing, and are these dynamics stable or do they change over time? (p. 1)

Byrd and Green (2011) draw attention to the various forms of agency, advocacy, and activism that are promoted through Maternal Pedagogies. They also explore the empowerment that comes through a teaching and learning exchange embedded in Maternal Pedagogies. Because all parties—teachers and learners—co-construct knowledge, the space in which Maternal Pedagogies occurs becomes a site of empowerment for all. Integral to Maternal Pedagogies is the engagement of the “whole student” (p. 16). In this way, the student’s whole identity as a student, parent, partner, community member, member of a particular cultural group, and so on becomes part of the learning environment. This description of Maternal Pedagogies captures my experience as a student in the above two courses. Moreover, these courses offered sites where I felt more engaged as an Indigenous student and mother than I have in other courses, because the essence of Maternal Pedagogy, in many ways, resonated with my

own maternal traditions. However, neither course included Indigenous women's content or lessons on cultural identity and neither promoted agency, advocacy, or activism from an Indigenous perspective.

Anderson (2007) contributes to the study of Maternal Pedagogies by presenting Indigenous ideologies of motherhood where she draws attention to the lack of literature on Indigenous mothers within motherhood studies, outlines the distinctiveness of Indigenous ideologies of motherhood, and considers strategies for its reclamation and empowerment. Her work complements the anthology *"Until Our Hearts Are On The Ground" Aboriginal Mothering, Oppression, Resistance and Rebirth* edited by Lavell-Harvard and Corbiere Lavell (2006). This work was followed by an anthology co-edited by Lavell-Harvard and Anderson (2014), *Mothers of the Nations: Indigenous Mothering as Global Resistance, Reclaiming and Recovery* that highlights the unique realities, shared histories, and lived experiences of Indigenous mothers to reveal the potential for a theory of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy alongside other Maternal Pedagogies. The work of Anderson, Lavell-Harvard, and Corbiere Lavell clearly distinguishes Indigenous feminisms and ideologies of motherhood from mainstream feminist approaches to motherhood studies.

Presenting an Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy

My current research has involved synthesizing the work of Maternal Pedagogy with research on Indigenous ideologies of motherhood to present a theory of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. I connect Maternal Pedagogies with women-centred Indigenous epistemologies that embrace the "whole student" within educational contexts. Thus, Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy extends Maternal Pedagogies by drawing from an

Indigenous women-centred worldview to establish a teaching and learning environment that can speak to the hearts and minds of students. This environment is intended to offer a safe Homeplace (hooks, 2007) where students can be their whole authentic selves and their realities and lived experiences are positioned as strengths (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2005) and key assets to establishing an ethical space (Ermine, 2007) for cross-cultural and anti-racist dialogue (St. Denis, 2007). Such dialogue is essential to decolonizing education for all learners (Battiste, 2013). In this way, I am both resisting the “keeper current” embedded in mainstream education described by Battiste (2013) and reclaiming Indigenous women-centred worldviews that are nurturing and nourishing for all learners. I came to Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a unique pedagogical approach that promotes the cultural identity development of students, encourages ethical dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners, and also fosters agency, advocacy, and activism through shared Indigenous maternal teachings. Three theoretical frameworks are braided together to enact Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy: cultural identity development, Homeplace, and Maternal Essence. I describe all three frameworks in Chapter 2.

My chapter “Rebirth and Renewal: Finding Empowerment through Indigenous Women’s Literature” (J. Brant, 2014b) showcased the transformative potential of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and served as a pilot study informing the development of this work as I describe in Chapter 3. This earlier research looked at the effect of culturally relevant and maternal-based curriculum on the empowerment of Indigenous mothering within an academic and community context. To clarify what I meant by the term empowerment of Indigenous mothering, I considered the connection between educational aspirations as they relate to and may be motivated by one’s role as a Mother and how

these aspirations extend to one's role as a community member. In the conclusion to that paper, I wrote about the women's responses to this pedagogical approach:

The women describe how the delivery of the course, based on Kim Anderson's theory of identity formation provided them with something relevant and useful that they were able to apply at home and within the community. The women described being inspired by the curriculum, coming to a deeper understanding of the traumas Indigenous women have faced, and finding their own voices to continue on their own reclaiming journeys. Perhaps what was most profound was that the women were able to connect with that maternal energy that inspires Indigenous women's literature. (p. 225)

Moreover, one participant noted a powerful feeling of personal transformation and the effect her own growth had on her involvement with family and community. The Elder responded by describing and affirming the feeling that the participant expressed, characterizing it as "coming home to your spirit, you're coming home to Indigenous knowledge that has been ingrained in all of us" (p. 218). The Elder continued by connecting the experience to the maternal energies that are understood as spirit or ancestral guides. In Chapter 2, I elaborate on this maternal energy when I describe how my understanding of Maternal Essence—an understanding informed by Indigenous women's literature and affirmed by the Elder—has shaped this research and my praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy.

As I move forward, I continue to draw on the emerging work of Maternal Pedagogies and embedded areas of Indigenous scholarship to inform my own research and teaching approach as I describe in the theoretical framework section of Chapter 2. I

enact Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy through course design and delivery that contextualizes the contemporary realities of Indigenous women through historical understandings, and advances achievement by prompting students to articulate and become connected with their own future aspirations. Through my work, and the connections I have made with other studies, I see Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a unique and unfolding framework with significant potential for capacity building and for promoting Indigenous family and community well-being. The women-centred approach that promotes Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is positioned as a relevant approach for inspiring nation building within a matriarchal worldview. Thus, this approach is consistent with traditional teachings and cultural understandings about Indigenous matrilineal societies.

I intend to explore the potential of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a way of teaching that fosters cultural identity development and holistic well-being. I also consider how this unique pedagogical approach promotes academic success for Indigenous women and empowers community involvement. As an emerging praxis, my assessment of the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy contributes to the existing scholarship on the importance of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in academia. It is my hope that this study will advance new understandings that will contribute to the advancement of Indigenous women in education and, by extension, the development of stronger families and communities.

Overview of Study

As noted above, the purpose of this qualitative inquiry is to explore the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a culturally relevant teaching and learning engagement

for Indigenous women. To date, my journey toward a praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy has involved a learning exchange with my students. This learning exchange involves familiarizing students with “the greater web of relationships” (J. Brant & Anderson, 2012, p. 202) and connections that can be found within Indigenous women’s scholarship and the theoretical models that serve as my course material. I draw from the aforementioned body of work on Maternal Pedagogies and Indigenous Maternal Theories to inform my curriculum design, course delivery, and role as an Indigenous educator. As students become familiar with this body of work and begin to see personal connections throughout the courses, “the power of ‘the eachother’; a power that comes from listening and telling” (J. Brant & Anderson, p. 204) begins to take shape, as does the living connection between theory and practice that forms praxis. The living connection between theory and praxis is described by Sandy Grande (2008) who presented a Red Pedagogy. Grande explained that Indigenous students and educators “deserve a pedagogy that cultivates a sense of collective agency as well as a praxis that targets the dismantling of colonialism, helping them navigate the excesses of dominant power and revitalization of Indigenous communities” (p. 236). She also drew attention to the importance of linking “the lived experience of theorizing to the processes of self-recovery and social transformation” (p. 236). My pilot study affirmed the living connection between theory and practice as participants described feeling safe bringing their whole authentic selves and sharing lived experiences within the space of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. Moreover, they noted their application of Indigenous theoretical models in their personal lives, homes, and communities as points of self-recovery and community well-being (J. Brant, 2014b). This current study extended the pilot study to assess the overall value of

Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy with respect to cultural identity development, holistic well-being, academic success, and community engagement.

I considered the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a transformative learning engagement for Indigenous women by drawing on the courses that I teach as sites where Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is enacted. One of these courses, INDG 2P17 *Reclaiming Indigenous Women's Literary Traditions and Educational Aspirations*, was offered as part of the Gidayaamin program, and the other two courses, INDG 3P47 *Indigenous Women's Literature: Activism and Empowerment*, and INDG 3P80 *Indigenous Mothering and Motherhood: Historical and Contemporary Realities*, are offered as Indigenous studies electives. Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is presented in INDG 2P17 by drawing on Kim Anderson's (2000) theory of identity formation. The four components of Anderson's theory—resist, reclaim, construct, and act—connect contemporary realities with historical realities (traditional and colonial) and lay the foundation for nurturing the future through a process of decolonization and reclamation. Anderson's theory aligns with the Indigenous teaching that you have to know where you have been in order to know where you are going, and is therefore well suited for the Gidayaamin program. I also incorporate Anderson's identity formation theory in the other two courses INDG 3P47 and INDG 3P80, and I extend this teaching through an understanding of Maternal Essence and an Indigenous application of bell hook's (2007) theory of Homeplace. Thus, I attempt to create safe classroom spaces that present nurturing and nourishing environments where cross-cultural dialogue can occur. This is important given the emotional nature of the issues that are discussed in these courses. I elaborate on Anderson's theory as well as Maternal Essence and an Indigenous

understanding of Homeplace in Chapter 2 when I describe the theoretical frameworks that shape this study.

Through Indigenous Maternal Methodology, which I outline in greater detail in Chapter 3, I draw from sharing circles, conversations with an Elder (Grandmother Shirley), and my ongoing research reflections. Indigenous Maternal Methodology is holistic in nature and informed by Indigenous women's cultural teachings, and the role of Grandmother Shirley was partly to ensure these teachings were central throughout the research. Thus, it offered a safe and nurturing space for participants to respond to the research questions. Consistent with other Indigenous methodologies, Indigenous Maternal Methodology presents a reciprocal research environment whereby the research rests within an ethical commitment to contribute to Indigenous community well-being.

Research Questions

As I move forward and journey towards clearing the path and exploring the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, the following overarching questions guide my study:

1. How does Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy honour and embrace Indigenous women's identities and roles as mothers, students, and community members?
2. How does Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy foster:
 - (a) cultural identity development,
 - (b) holistic well-being,
 - (c) academic success, and
 - (d) community engagement?
3. What improvements can be made to the delivery of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy?

For clarity, I defined the concepts in the second research question as part of my introduction to the participants at the beginning of the sharing circles and also provide this information below:

Cultural identity development. As I have described earlier, my understanding of cultural identity development for Indigenous women is supported by the work of Anderson (2000) on the cultural identity formation of Indigenous women as well as my own personal experiences. To deepen my understanding of cultural identity theory as it applies to Indigenous learners, I have also familiarized myself with the work of other Indigenous scholars in this area (Fiske, 2006; Horse, 2005, 2012; Lawrence, 2003; A. Wilson, 2004; Young, 2005). Cultural identity development for Indigenous women is a continual process that is shaped by the complexities of colonization and decolonization. Individual experiences of cultural identity development are unique but may share many commonalities. The sharing circles offered an opportunity for the participants to contribute to an evolving understanding of cultural identity development within the context of teaching and learning through Indigenous women-centered curriculum.

Holistic well-being. I define well-being through a holistic understanding that includes a balance of the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual components of self as well as a mainstream definition of well-being that includes educational attainment and economic sufficiency. My understanding of holistic well-being is informed by the Haudenosaunee principle *Ka'nikonhrí:yo*, which teaches us to bring a “good mind” to all that we do. From an Anishnaabee perspective, this understanding is also encouraged through *Mino-biimaadiziwinan*, which is a belief in living “the good life” through a good mind that involves a harmonious balance of the mind, body, and spirit. (Anderson, 2005;

Newhouse & FitzMaurice, 2012). This definition is also informed by Alex Wilson (2004) whose research on Aboriginal women's cultural identity and wellness advances a holistic understanding that connects individual, family, and community well-being. According to A. Wilson, community wellness starts in the home and begins with personal well-being, which extends to relationships with others and behaviours, and is also rooted within connections to cultural traditions. It is also important to understand the rippling impact of well-being as personal extends to communal and communal in turn affects personal: "Well-being ripples from and through self ... family ... extended family ... community ... nation" (A. Wilson, 2004, p. 20).

Academic success. Although academic success is generally defined by academic achievement and associated with high marks, I favour a definition of academic success for Indigenous women that includes a balance of academic achievement with the attainment of one's educational goals and aspirations. For many Indigenous students, educational goals are inspired by the value of reciprocity and the intention of giving back to the community (Battiste, 1998; J. Brant, 2011; Monture-Angus, 1995). For Indigenous women specifically, educational goals are often also embedded within a desire to contribute to the betterment of their families and communities (J. Brant, 2011; Pomrenke, 2011). The participants in the current study also had the opportunity to articulate their understandings of Indigenous women's academic success.

Community engagement. The term community engagement refers to how involved women are with the Indigenous community and in what ways (locally, nationally, and globally) through their participation, advocacy, and other connections.

Background

In his book, *The New Buffalo: The Struggle for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada*, Stonechild (2006) reconsiders the position of education as the “new buffalo.” He draws attention to the origins of the proverb often heard in Indigenous circles:

In the past, the buffalo met virtually every need of the North American Indian, from food to shelter; this animal was considered to be a gift from the Creator intended to provide for the peoples’ needs. Today, Elders say that education, rather than bison, needs to be relied upon for survival. (pp. 1–2)

As Stonechild points out, however, much work still needs to be done if education is to “truly be the ‘new buffalo’ that will ensure a strong and prosperous future for First Nations” (p. 1).

Aboriginal access to postsecondary education in Canada has been an area of concern for many years, and, as a result, there have been a number of initiatives put in place to increase the numbers of Aboriginal students in higher education programs (Bonnycastle & Prentice, 2011; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2004; Stonechild, 2006). The statistics and achievement gaps between Aboriginal peoples and their non-Aboriginal counterparts are well known, and varying ways to address these achievement gaps have been advanced. Moreover, key rationales for concern with these gaps have also been identified. Political concern builds a case by pointing out that Aboriginal people are the fastest growing segment of the population with 50% of that population being under the age of 25 (Statistics Canada, 2011). The most recent Statistics Canada (2016) report on Aboriginal women and girls

concludes that the female Aboriginal population has increased by 20% in comparison to a 4.8% increase for non-Aboriginal women (p. 14). Moreover, an earlier Statistics Canada (2011) report outlined that Aboriginal women were demographically much younger than non-Aboriginal women, were more likely to have younger and larger families, and were more likely to be lone parents as well as teen parents (p. 15). Thus, as the argument has been advanced, all Canadians should be concerned with the advancement of Aboriginal peoples in education as they are rapidly reaching the age at which they would be expected to enter the Canadian labour market (Mendelson, 2006; Usher, 2009; D. Wilson & Macdonald, 2010). In fact, the Statistics Canada (2011) report points out that unemployment rates are much higher for Aboriginal women than for non-Aboriginal women, but this difference is significantly minimized for those women who have university degrees (p. 31). This decline in the unemployment gap highlights the benefits of university education among Aboriginal women. What was striking about the report was that it recognizes the unique median income pattern among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women at the bachelor's and master's degree levels. In fact, the Statistics Canada report makes reference to D. Wilson and Macdonald's (2010) study on the income gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. D. Wilson and Macdonald wrote:

Perhaps most startling, Aboriginal women who have obtained at least a Bachelor's degree actually have higher median incomes than non-Aboriginal Canadian women with equivalent education. This is the only segment of Aboriginal society that exceeds the median incomes of their non-Aboriginal counterparts. (p. 4)

In light of the above findings, it is evident that the benefits of education for Aboriginal peoples are becoming increasingly recognized. Moreover, with the adverse economic and associated social conditions under which many Aboriginal women and mothers are living, the above trend is worthy of more research as it highlights the benefits of university education for Aboriginal women. From an Aboriginal perspective, education has already been positioned as critical to supporting the well-being of our communities (Battiste, 2013; Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere Lavell, 2012; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996; L. T. Smith, 1999; Stonechild, 2006). Merging Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives on the importance of supporting academic success highlights the potential of education to truly become the new buffalo for Aboriginal people generally and Aboriginal women specifically. However, an education system founded on principles of cognitive imperialism—defined by Battiste (2013) as an education system founded on Eurocentric assumptions, values, and methodologies—will not meet the needs of Aboriginal learners. Battiste’s work affirms the importance of ensuring that institutions of higher learning are meeting the educational needs of Aboriginal women, families, and communities so they can flourish as they did in the days of the buffalo.

Research on Aboriginal postsecondary success ranges from dominant notions of access and retention to more community-based approaches advocating for localized input and an infusion of cultural support within mainstream institutions (Bonnycastle & Prentice, 2011; Fulford, 2007). Moreover, there has been a recent shift beyond access to retention. Bonnycastle and Prentice (2011) draw attention to the importance of this shift by pointing out that “although there have been many successes in increasing the number

of Aboriginal students at post-secondary institutions, they still struggle with retention” (p. 2). Bonnycastle and Prentice advise that concern with retention has typically been framed within a deficiency mindset that ignores the macro-structural barriers that lead to unacceptably high attrition rates. They draw attention to the historical, social, geographic, demographic, and cultural barriers that have been identified by several macro-structural studies that challenge the deficiency mindset. Their study contributes by underscoring the lack of attention given to the childcare needs and familial priorities of Aboriginal students, especially Aboriginal women. Likewise, my own research may be described as a branch of this much larger area of work towards promoting Indigenous student success in postsecondary education. Through my work, I am committed to the holistic well-being of Indigenous communities through culturally relevant educational opportunities and pedagogical support for Indigenous women in education.

My focus on Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy privileges the experiences of Indigenous women pursuing university degrees, many of whom are mothers and the first teachers of our youngest generations (NWAC, 2005). Within Indigenous worldviews, mothers are understood to be the very first teachers of their children, and, in fact, children are said to be learning as early as in the womb before they are born. Mohawk midwife Katsi Cook (2003) articulates that “women are the first environment” (para. 5). Immediately from birth, in most cases, it is the mother who is the first teacher during the first moments of life. This extends from infant to early years. It is understood that 0 to 6 are the years that have the most influence on development that will affect subsequent years (Ball, 2007). Again, in many cases, it is the mother that has the most influence during this time. I draw from this perspective to highlight the importance of nurturing

women and young mothers through education that promotes cultural identity development and empowerment to support the well-being of women so they are emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically healthy to nurture and support themselves and their children. This sentiment is also expressed by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC, 2005) that draws attention to "the teachings that women are the first teachers to our children of our cultures, languages and traditions" (p. 4). My research emphasizes the importance of cultural identity development and holistic support for Indigenous women in education that honours and supports familial realities and encourages the emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical well-being of the first teachers of our future generations. With the above focus driving my research, I consider Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a potential site for nurturing the learning spirit of Indigenous women and fully embracing their identities by honouring familial and communal responsibilities. Moreover, I present Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a nurturing pedagogy that is inclusive of all learners as it connects ancient Indigenous worldviews that honour the connections to Mother Earth and the lessons that surround us all in the natural world (Cook, 2003).

Rationale

The rationale for this study rests in my commitment to promote healing and well-being within Indigenous communities through education that is culturally relevant. My journey toward the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is energized by my desire to advocate for culturally relevant education that is Indigenous and women centred. I draw on government documents, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholarship to highlight the value of education for Indigenous peoples generally and Indigenous women

specifically. In honour of my cultural understandings and the expressed sentiments of Indigenous women scholars, my immediate focus is on Indigenous women's educational opportunities and the connections between cultural identity development, holistic learning support, and well-being. I draw on the work of A. Wilson (2004) whose research on Aboriginal cultural identity and wellness advances a holistic understanding that connects individual, family, and community well-being.

Given the pressing social concern of the postsecondary educational achievement gaps between Aboriginal people and their non-Aboriginal counterparts, the House of Commons (2007) outlined the urgency of Aboriginal access to postsecondary education. At that time, Michael Mendelson of the Caledon Institute of Social Policy stated, "every single Aboriginal student who gets into a post-secondary education institution is vitally important to Canada and to their communities, an incredible opportunity to make a contribution to our future" (House of Commons, Parliament of Canada, 2007, p. 11). The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC, 2009) also responded by emphasizing the need to address the achievement gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women: "It is critical that the unique circumstances of Aboriginal girls and women are addressed by developing and implementing educational policies and systems that meet their needs and which will, by extension, also benefit their families and their communities" (p. 1). The recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC, 2016) reinforces this now more urgent call by highlighting the role of education in reconciliation and including Calls to Action for education reform to redress the intergenerational effects of the Indian Residential School system and the ongoing colonialization that permeates public education.

My research addresses the aforementioned achievement gap and broader societal imperative by exploring the links between culturally relevant educational programming, cultural identity development, and Indigenous women students' success. Moreover, as I drew on the work of Stonechild (2006) who reconsiders the often-quoted proverb that positions education as the new buffalo, my research is grounded within this desire for education to bring healing and wellness back to Indigenous communities. As I explain in Chapter 8, this work also aligns with the TRC's (2016) Calls to Action and advances truth and reconciliation within safe classroom Homeplaces where all learners can be engaged.

Extending my rationale for focusing on supporting the academic success of Indigenous women through an exploration of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy are the following words shared by Cree Lawyer and human rights activist, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, which highlight the powerful role of Indigenous women within a community context: "It is women who give birth both in the physical and spiritual sense to the social, political and cultural life of the community" (as cited in Anderson, 2007, p. 774). Indeed, the aforementioned statement is the essence of a matriarchal worldview that holds women in high esteem. Often referred to as the backbone of the community, Indigenous women are held to this status within traditional contexts. Contemporary realities, however, are much more complex when it comes to the everyday realities of Indigenous women in a larger Canadian context. As Lavell-Harvard and Corbiere Lavell (2012) point out, Aboriginal women may be described as the most socially disadvantaged in Canada. Given this very harsh reality, Lavell-Harvard's (2011) research focus on the successes of Aboriginal women in postsecondary education is critical, especially in light of the

powerful roles these women play in their families, communities, and nations. In sharing the success stories of her participants and exposing the “hostilities” that perpetuate Aboriginal women’s oppression in education, her research provides valuable insights that can enlighten university employees, educators, and most importantly future Aboriginal scholars so that viable and culturally relevant educational solutions can surface. Moreover, such work serves as a contemporary means of re-connecting Aboriginal women with their inherent leadership traditions as described below.

Margaret Lavallee is cited in Kenny (2006) as stating, “When the women heal, the family will heal. And when the family heals the Nation will heal” (p. 551). Her words not only connect back to the traditional roles of Indigenous women in matriarchal and egalitarian societies, but also reaffirm the importance of returning to those roles in promoting Indigenous women’s well-being in contemporary societies. Consider the above words with Kim Anderson’s (2000) assertion about Native women’s identity development:

IDENTITY RECOVERY FOR OUR PEOPLE inevitably involves the reclaiming of tradition, the picking up of those things that were left scattered along the path of colonization. This process is significant towards our recovery because it involves reclaiming those things that were wrongfully taken, but also because many of our ancestral traditions, customs and lifeways are better for us than the western practices that were thrust upon us in their place. Certainly, for Native women, reclaiming tradition is the means by which we can determine a feminine identity that moves us away from the western patriarchal model. (p. 157)

I believe it is important to acknowledge that Indigenous well-being is rooted in the connection between cultural traditions. In my current research, I therefore draw upon an emerging body of scholarship that connects access to cultural traditions with self-empowerment, strong cultural identity development, and increased educational success (Hundleby, Gfellner, & Racine, 2007; A. Wilson, 2004; Yuen & Pedlar, 2009). Such studies inform the lens through which I view the connection between Indigenous women's identity development and educational success. Thus, this doctoral work contextualizes the university experiences of Indigenous women through a strength-based view that honours student knowledge and lived experiences and positions culture, tradition, and language as core elements of success. Drawing from Indigenous community knowledges and developing intercultural relationships are integral to this strength-based approach. Extending this perspective, my motivation and rationale for focusing on Indigenous women in education rests on the traditional understanding, expressed by Lavallee (2006), that community well-being begins with women.

In light of the above, my exploration of the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is timely. Exploring the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, which is educational programming designed specifically for Indigenous women, in supporting cultural identity development and academic success has the potential to inform future programming and curriculum development for Indigenous Studies and education courses specifically as well as for other undergraduate courses and student support services more broadly. This study may also advance best practices for embracing the unique and specific needs of Indigenous women and their families as educational opportunities, and can thereby provide a response to the TRC's (2016) Calls to Action. With the overall goal

of improving Indigenous women's well-being in mind, it is my hope to advance new understandings about Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy that will contribute positive effects for the advancement of Indigenous women in education. At the heart of my research is the desire to promote and restore individual, familial, and community well-being through culturally relevant educational opportunities for Indigenous women.

Although my immediate focus has been on Indigenous women's realities in education, I position Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a teaching and learning engagement that creates a meaningful environment for all learners. Through a nurturing and welcoming student-centred approach, all learners are encouraged to bring their whole authentic selves into the classroom and engage in cross-cultural dialogue. Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy creates a safe and ethical space for Indigenous, non-Indigenous, women, men, and two-spirit individuals, regardless of their connection to the act of being a mother, or engaging in a mothering role. In the same way that Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy connects all Indigenous women regardless of their status as mothers or relationship to their birth mothers and moves beyond "biologically-defined identities" associated with motherhood (Bédard, 2006), it encourages a safe space that can engage all learners regardless of their identities.

Outline of the Document

This document outlines my journey toward the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and presents the research story of the women, me, Grandmother Lorene (the Elder involved in the pilot study), and Grandmother Shirley. This research story is a collective vision put forth for future Indigenous women students and educators who will take on the task of continuing to clear the path toward Indigenous scholarship that is

grounded within Indigenous worldviews and aligns with contemporary realities and visions of Indigenous learners. In this chapter, I have introduced my qualitative approach, which I label Indigenous Maternal Methodology, to explore the connection between Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and cultural identity development, and the relationship this teaching and learning engagement has with academic success as well as overall family and community well-being. I laid out the context from which my scholarly directions are inspired, and provided an overview of the research questions that guided this study. I also included a brief historical background of Indigenous education along with some recent demographic information that sets the context for understanding Indigenous educational realities along with a rationale to highlight the urgency and timeliness of this research. I continued by specifying the unique educational realities of Indigenous women specifically.

In Chapter 2, I present the historical context of Indigenous education in Canada and describe the theoretical frameworks that informed this study. This is followed by a discussion about decolonizing education. I include a section on Indigenous women's educational access and success and a section on Indigenous women's expressions of identity. To prepare the reader for a holistic understanding of the research story, Chapter 2 ends with a section that connects all layers of the literature review with Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy.

In Chapter 3, I begin by drawing attention to the complexities of the very act of doing research within Indigenous communities. I articulate the appropriateness of Indigenous Research Methodology and provide a description of Indigenous Maternal Methodology. Following this, I describe the pilot study that informed and provided

secondary data for this study. This is followed by a description of the research methods and collective data analysis. To honour Indigenous research principles, I then describe the importance of gifting this research back to the community. Chapter 3 ends with attention to key ethical considerations that I considered throughout this study.

The research story is presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. These chapters are guided by the lessons derived from sweetgrass teachings that emerged throughout the research process and in my conversations with Grandmother Shirley. These teachings are also embedded in Indigenous women's literature and course material (B. Brant & Laronde, 1996; Carvell, 2005; Kimmerer, 2013). I have included an interchapter before and one after this set of chapters to help readers understand the complexities and multilayered experiences that are presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. These interchapters are also intended to metaphorically walk the reader through this journey toward the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy.

In Chapter 7, I revisit the research questions to present a summary of the findings before delving into a discussion that connects the women's narratives to the theoretical underpinnings that shape Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. I then draw on the work of Delgado Bernal (2002) to present the links between epistemology, methodology, and pedagogy. This is followed by a section that advances Indigenous Maternal Methodology to showcase my methodological contributions that have emerged from this study. I then move on to highlight Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a living connection between theory and practice. I also include a section on the connections with other empowered communities before coming full circle to revisit the lessons of the sweetgrass basket.

In Chapter 8, I present the conclusion to this study that includes pedagogical lessons that educators may carry in their own sweetgrass baskets to journey forward and honour the collective vision of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. This final chapter also extends Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy to all students and includes a section that aligns this teaching praxis with the TRC's (2016) Calls to Action in the spirit of advancing safe Homeplaces for all learners, educators, and scholars to become involved in reconciliation.

CHAPTER 2: CLEARING THE PATH

This literature review begins with an outline of the historical policies that have played a significant role in the lives of Indigenous peoples generally and Indigenous women specifically. I then draw upon several studies that frame the push for Indigenous education and position it as a benefit for all learners. Following this, I present literature that outlines Indigenous women's access and success in education. I then move on to present the three theoretical strands of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. This is followed by a section on the associated theoretical frameworks that inform this study.

A Historical Context of Indigenous Women's Realities in Canada

Because women were held in such high esteem in pre-contact societies, their community status threatened the patriarchal social structure that permeated the settler mindset. Indigenous women were seen as a threat to newcomer visions of patriarchal dominance and expansion (A. Smith, 2003). The following Cheyenne proverb is telling in consideration of the colonial mindset that fostered the conquest of what was considered new land: "A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground. Then it is done, no matter how brave its warriors or strong its weapons" (Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere Lavell, 2006, p. vii). These often-quoted words capture the essence of a colonial agenda threatened by the ability of Native women "to reproduce the next generation of people who can resist colonization" (A. Smith, 2003, p. 78). Moreover, as A. Smith (2003) expresses, settler women were in awe of the power Indigenous women held in matriarchal societies. The demonization of Indigenous womanhood therefore served to protect and enforce the patriarchal family structure. Indeed, Canada's early development as a "Nation" cannot be understood without acknowledgement of significant

attacks on Indigenous womanhood. I am committed to promoting this contextual understanding within my academic work as I share the following shameful moments of Canada's history.

For so long, Indigenous women in Canada have been oppressed by legally sanctioned initiatives such as the residential school system that directly impeded parenting rights by removing children from their families and communities and placing them in boarding schools where they were subject to many abuses and taught to be ashamed of their identities, the pass system that controlled the movement of Indigenous women and prohibited their travel off reserve to purchase family necessities or seek employment, and the eugenics movement that promoted the sterilization of Indigenous women (Anderson, 2000; Carter, 2006). The Sixties Scoop, involving the mass removal of Indigenous children from their homes, was another immediate attack on Indigenous women whose very rights to parent their own children were taken (Cull, 2006). This trend continues today with an alarming number of Indigenous children currently in state care. As Cindy Blackstock (2003) reported, the number of Indigenous children in state care is significantly higher than the number of children who attended residential schools. These attacks on Indigenous women have severely altered Indigenous communities.

Although my research positions education as a vehicle for shifting many of the contemporary realities that plague Indigenous women, it must be understood that education itself has in fact led to many of these disheartening realities. Indigenous peoples, however, still view education as a contemporary mode of survival and key to building strong communities (Battiste, 2013; Lavell-Harvard, 2011; RCAP, 1996; Stonechild 2006). The following quote expresses this sentiment:

Education is the most powerful institution in any society, and teachers are its most powerful agents. As Aboriginal people, we know this very intimately. Education has been a force of destruction. It is also a powerful source for construction, and it can produce citizens who are capable of determining their own future. (Williams, 2000/2008, p. 145)

I too believe that education can be a powerful site for construction and promotion of self-determination. This profound statement influences my driving goal to change the contemporary realities of Indigenous women through education that is meaningful, culturally relevant, and reflective of the realities, histories, and contemporary visions that Indigenous women share. However, in order for education to truly serve as the new buffalo for Indigenous peoples, significant steps must be taken towards decolonizing education (Battiste, 2013; Stonechild, 2006).

Framing the Push for Indigenous Education

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996) outlined the desire for Aboriginal peoples to have education serve as “hope for the future” (p. 434). The desire and value placed on education as expressed by the RCAP is outlined in Volume 3 *Gathering Strength*. The education section of *Gathering Strength* is important to my study because it attests to not only the importance of education as a vehicle to promote the full participation of Aboriginal peoples in society, but also the desire for education to “develop children and youth as Aboriginal citizens, linguistically and culturally competent to assume the responsibilities of their nations” (p. 434). Also outlined in *Gathering Strength* is the need for culturally relevant support for Aboriginal women in education such as childcare opportunities based on the Aboriginal Head Start model.

Blair Stonechild (2006) looked at historical and political issues associated with Aboriginal higher education in Canada. He exposed the implications associated with unsustainable and unreliable funding for Aboriginal-specific programming, and also the governance issues that constrain program success. Although he noted that “the federal government’s refusal to accept a fiduciary responsibility for First Nations post-secondary education implies that Aboriginal institutions will be forced to partner with mainstream universities and colleges for recognition of additional resources” (p. 124), he also pointed out that ongoing colonial constructs, such as the assertion of Western values and the delegitimization of Indigenous knowledges, tend to make such partnerships problematic. Furthermore, he noted that programs that are embedded within Indigenous worldviews and philosophies tend to move beyond access to retention and success.

Noting that education policy for Aboriginal peoples continues to be administered through the Indian Act, Margaret Kovach (2009) documented the ways policy has wavered back and forth between its contradictory goals of eradicating culture and preparing Aboriginal students to return home and bring knowledge back to their reserves. As Kovach maintains, this preparation tends to focus on vocational training rather than academic training through “a transparent policy of maintaining the socioeconomic marginalization of Indigenous peoples” (p. 159). Further, Kovach asserted, “consistent throughout the shifts in strategy, the philosophy governing educational policy for Indian people promoted cultural oppression in the form of assimilation, marginalization, or negligence” (p. 160). Kovach’s work is an important consideration in light of the recently proposed First Nations Education Act (House of Commons, 2014). Kovach’s work strengthens my own critical engagement as I deconstruct Indigenous Education policies

and strive toward academic programming that is culturally relevant and well suited to meet the expressed educational desires of Indigenous women, families, and communities.

Kanu (2011) articulated that the push to integrate Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into the curriculum encompasses a response to the assimilationist nature of education. At the same time, it also serves to redress colonial processes as all learners should expand their understandings “beyond a predominantly Eurocentric lens” (p. 16). Because 65% of Aboriginal students are going to elementary and secondary schools that are located off-reserve (Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies [CAAS], 2002), and very few postsecondary programs are offered in First Nations communities, discussion about Indigenous education must emphasize the need for ethical and culturally safe spaces in mainstream institutions of higher learning. In this regard, a number of academics draw attention to the benefit of Indigenous curriculum for all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; CAAS, 2002; Ermine, 2007; Kanu, 2011; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). For example, Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) explained that Indigenous students are looking for “an education that respects them for who they are, that is relevant to their view of the world, that offers reciprocity in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise responsibility over their own lives” (pp. 107–108). Moreover, as Kirkness and Barnhardt expressed, “to the extent universities are able to reconstruct themselves to be more relevant to, and accepting of First Nations students’ perspectives and experiences, they will be that much more relevant and responsive to the needs of all students” (p. 103). Other scholars recognize the limitations of recruitment and retention initiatives that fail to recognize the need for culturally relevant programming (J. Brant, 2011; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991;

Kovach, 2009). For example, Kovach (2009) pointed out that “welcoming Indigenous students but not allowing for learning, scholarship, and research that is congruent with Indigenous paradigms is simply a nuanced variation of a past strategy—same old, same old” (p. 163). Focusing beyond retention involves creating ethical spaces that can facilitate Indigenous student success while maintaining and promoting cultural identity development as described in Chapter 1 and expanded upon further in the theoretical framework that follows.

With the recent work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC, 2016), the push for Indigenous education can be further and perhaps more widely understood. On May 10, 2006, the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement was approved. This agreement represented the largest out-of-court class-action settlement in Canadian history and led to the establishment of the TRC, which allocated 60 million dollars over five years to redress the human rights injustices, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse that took place in residential schools (Monchalin, 2016). The TRC formally commenced in June 2008 and collected over 6,750 survivor and witness statements that were shared by residential school survivors during the TRC’s ongoing statement-gathering process that took place from 2009 to 2014. The final reports were released on June 30, 2015, with closing ceremonies in Ottawa from May 31 to June 3, 2015. In response to Canada’s colonial history, the legacy of residential schools and the ongoing colonial processes that permeate all sectors of Canadian society, the TRC has released a series of educational documents including 94 Calls to Action (TRC), some of which are directly aimed at postsecondary institutions. Thus, this research is timely and I

position this work as a response to the TRC's Calls to Action and elaborate by offering pedagogical lessons for educators in Chapter 8.

Indigenous Women's Educational Access and Success

When I began my research on the experiences of Indigenous women in education, I was not surprised by what I found. Indigenous women have unique and specific educational needs associated with social, cultural, racial, political, linguistic, and epistemological barriers that hinder their access to and success in mainstream postsecondary institutions (Bonnycastle & Prentice, 2011; Kenny, 2006; Lavell-Harvard, 2011; Monture-Angus, 2003; NWAC, 2009). As well, Indigenous families tend to be younger, larger, and more often headed by single mothers than non-Indigenous families (Anderson, 2007; Statistics Canada, 2009). The lack of financial, cultural, and childcare supports forces many young Indigenous women to become marginalized from the social and economic opportunities of a postsecondary education as noted by recent demographics (Statistics Canada, 2016), and this compromises the well-being of not only these young Indigenous women, but also their families and communities. As a young single mother of two children struggling to find balance within the university while negotiating my way through a number of social supports that were unfeasible, overlapping, and at times degrading, I knew all too well the very statistics I read and I understood the personal accounts that were shared through other Indigenous women's narratives. From my own experiences, I knew there were ways to work through these very oppressive systems but these strategies often came with personal costs.

In her doctoral work, *The Power of Silence and the Price of Success: Academic Achievement as Transformational Resistance for Aboriginal Women*, Memee Lavell-

Harvard (2011) documented the stories of successful Aboriginal women in undergraduate and graduate degrees who described the personal costs associated with their academic success. In part, envisioning a holistic system of support for Aboriginal women is about creating opportunities for academic success without adding these personal costs. Her research is similar to my master's work on the barriers that Aboriginal women face throughout university. Her emphasis on the successes of women, however, was uniquely presented and offers valuable insights that I draw on as I develop and refine the current study.

As Lavell-Harvard so eloquently stated, “researching the lived experiences of the more academically successful members of the Aboriginal student population has the potential to provide significant insight into strategies for academic and cultural survival” (p. 6). Lavell-Harvard emphasized her focus on sharing success strategies as a way to increase the “overall rates of Aboriginal academic achievement” and “to facilitate a replication of that success” (p. 6) by drawing on a limited pool of scholars whose work also attests to the importance of providing opportunities for Aboriginal women. Beyond this, Lavell-Harvard also expressed that her focus on success could serve to breakdown the negative and racist stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples that continue to exist in academic institutions.

Much like my master's work that presented a vision of Indigenous women's educational access and success, Lavell-Harvard's (2011) work presents a paradigm shift away from deficit views that problematize Indigenous women in education. A shift away from deficit views prompts one to look deeper into the problems that lay within the education system itself (Battiste, 2013). Lavell-Harvard adopted an anti-racist feminist

framework to bring light to the multiple and multi-faceted challenges that her participants overcame throughout their studies and to reveal the inequities, and the racist and sexist attitudes that continue to oppress Indigenous women in mainstream education systems. This paradigm shift also privileges a strength-based approach that positions culture and community as key educational assets (J. Brant, 2011; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Lavell-Harvard, 2011). Lavell-Harvard's work presents a strength-based approach by highlighting Aboriginal women's academic achievement as transformational resistance. As Lavell-Harvard noted, transformational resistance stems from an awareness of social inequities, and a belief in education as a vehicle of social change for Aboriginal families and communities. This description presents the connection between Indigenous women's educational access and success and community capacity-building initiatives that ultimately promote well-being.

Theoretical Foundations of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy

As I wrote in Chapter 1, Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is delivered by braiding together three theoretical foundations: cultural identity, Homeplace, and Maternal Essence. In this section, I describe each of the three strands that shape the way I have designed and delivered my courses.

Cultural Identity

My understanding of cultural identity for Indigenous women is informed by the work of Anderson (2000). Anderson presents her theory of identity formation within the framework of a Medicine Wheel that includes four components: resist, reclaim, construct, and act. Anderson describes this as a process through which Indigenous women "engage in a process of self-definition," which includes "resisting negative definitions of being;

reclaiming Aboriginal tradition; constructing a positive identity by translating tradition into the contemporary context; and acting on that identity in a way that nourishes the overall well-being of our communities” (p. 15). My comprehensive portfolio included my personal application of this framework as it shaped my decolonizing doctoral path throughout the program. I also described how I have applied this framework in the courses that I teach, specifically in the course *INDG 2P17 Reclaiming Indigenous Women’s Literary Traditions and Educational Aspirations* by beginning with material that highlights the points of settler contact and colonial policies that Indigenous women have resisted, as well as the negative stereotypes that continue to perpetuate social inequities for Indigenous women. I urge students to resist negative definitions of being and to reclaim authentic definitions of being by learning about and understanding Canada’s colonial history and grasping the resilience of Indigenous women who kept traditions underground (Anderson, 2000). I encourage students to consider how Indigenous women construct positive identities by expressing their traditions within contemporary contexts. Finally, the course comes full circle with the act component by showcasing the ways Indigenous women present positive definitions of being. Students are also prompted to consider the leadership roles of Indigenous women (J. Brant, 2014b). Anderson’s theoretical model also offers a solid foundation that has shaped my approach to mapping out the cultural identity development of participants in this research.

Homeplace

As noted in Chapter 1, Homeplace serves as an essential strand of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as it represents the work that I do to establish the classroom as a site

of resistance and of renewal. Homeplace is informed by the work of bell hooks (2007) who presented the theory of Homeplace by drawing on the experiences of Black women within the context of racial oppression and sexist domination. Although Homeplace is defined as a safe place for renewal and self-recovery, it is also described as a site of resistance:

Black women resisted by making homes where all Black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied to us on the outside in the public world. (p. 267)

As hooks explained, love and respect for self could not be learned in the culture of White supremacy; thus, Homeplace took place behind closed doors where there was an opportunity for nurturing and a place “where we can heal our wounds and become whole” (p. 272).

Indigenous women have also had to create safe spaces of resistance intended to nurture and bring wholeness to their families and communities. When children have been removed from communities and placed in residential schools, foster care, and detention facilities, opportunities to create such spaces have not always been possible. Even at these difficult times, Indigenous women have had other ways of providing places for renewal and self-recovery. In my article “From Historical Memories to Contemporary Visions: Honouring Indigenous Maternal Histories” (J. Brant, 2014a), I draw attention to the maternal legacy that Indigenous women held sacred and kept safe for future generations despite the harsh colonial realities that continually attacked Indigenous families:

These traditions have been carried silently in the hearts of women and creatively passed on to younger generations for the survival of Indigenous nations. That our traditions are still alive is testament to the love, strength, and resiliency of the grandmothers who nurtured them, as cultural carriers, to ensure that they could be revived today. (p. 37)

Like Homeplace, the silent place where Indigenous maternal traditions were carried, has also served as a site of resistance that has led to renewal. The continuity of these traditions demonstrates the deep love the women expressed for future generations. Today many young Indigenous families are unconnected to these traditions. They are trying to find their way back home. There are also many who are becoming reconnected and sharing stories of “homecoming” (Acoose, 1995; B. Brant, 1997).

Mary Isabelle Young (2005) who presented a narrative inquiry into language as identity also positioned the classroom as a potential site of Homeplace. Her research involved understanding the cultural identity development of Indigenous students with a focus on the connection of language and identity. Her study serves as a useful model for my work on Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a potential site of empowerment and cultural identity development as she highlighted the importance of meaningful curriculum. Young shared her own narrative of negotiating multiple identities throughout her educational journey. She questioned whether Aboriginal students’ identities remain intact while they attend university. Drawing on the work of bell hooks who presents “Homeplace” as a site of resistance, Young wrote “their educational experiences vary and yet their notion of ‘belonging’ is always connected to their ‘Homeplace’” (p. 37).

I draw on the work of cultural and racial identity theorists that I outline below along with hooks (2007), Young (2005), Acoose (1995), and B. Brant (1997) to position Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as an intellectual site for Homeplace that can provide a sense of resistance, renewal, and homecoming for Indigenous students. As noted, Kim Anderson's (2000) identity formation theory is applied to literature I share in my courses, including the work of Acoose and B. Brant. Thus, difficult stories and disheartening realities are shared through Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy to contribute to a classroom Homeplace as a site of resistance and a space for renewal and self-recovery.

Maternal Essence

A prevalent theme that is common in Indigenous women's literature is the presence of Maternal Essence. This is expressed by Indigenous authors in many ways including a maternal energy that guides them throughout their life journey (Janice Acoose), that serves as the inspiration for their writing (Beth Brant), or the maternal figures who have had a significant or influential effect on other characters of the author of an autobiography (Maria Campbell). Braided with cultural identity theory and Homeplace, Maternal Essence is foundational to Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. As I wrote in "Rebirth and Renewal: Finding Empowerment through Indigenous Women's Literature," Indigenous women have a profound connection to the maternal energies that surround us:

Indigenous women have been writing about this connection for years. Sylvia Terzian (2008) draws attention to this "maternal legacy" by reflecting on the mother figure in Native women's literature "as the site at which all things are interconnected" (p. 147). Moreover, describing the mother figure as a "web of

continuity” she suggests that “the mother’s web functions as a survival mechanism, a perpetuating force of female agency that enables the resilience of Native peoples and the continuity of Native cultural traditions (p. 147). Emma LaRocque (2009) also writes about the interconnectedness between mothering, Aboriginal women’s literature, and cultural continuity....These maternal theories present in Indigenous women’s writing also stand in contrast to the patriarchal forces that have severely altered that maternal legacy [within] Indigenous communities. (J. Brant, 2014b, p. 208)

My understanding of Maternal Essence further developed during the pilot study as Grandmother Lorene continually referred to the presence of maternal energy that guided the research and the women’s educational journeys. Thus, as I describe in Chapter 3, Maternal Essence is foundational to Indigenous Maternal Methodology.

Maternal Essence is also expressed in the blood memory and the maternal legacy that has been passed down intergenerationally by Indigenous women as I outlined in my work on Indigenous maternal histories:

Indigenous women come from a strong people. Our grandmothers have left us with a very powerful legacy of maternal power. They were survivors. Our very existence is testament to their strength. Our cultural continuity is testament to the gifts they nurtured and held sacred so that we could learn from them and revive them today. From a time when our ways of life were outlawed—particularly our ceremonies of bringing new life into this land—our grandmothers held on to them; providing us with “story medicine” that awakens our sacred birthing ceremonies at a time of Indigenous resurgence. As Indigenous women, we have

survived years of attacks on our maternal legacies. Our very right to mother our own children was taken through the residential school system, the eugenics movement, and the sixties scoop. We see this continue today with the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in state care and the continued removal of childbirth from our communities. It is important for us to understand this history as we work towards decolonizing ourselves, our families, and our communities. (J. Brant, 2014a, p. 50)

The above framework connects learners to understandings about the legacy of Maternal Essence as a way of coming to know the strength and resilience of Indigenous women. By braiding together the three strands of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy: cultural identity, Homeplace, and Maternal Essence; a safe Homeplace for critical race analysis (St. Denis, 2007) is enacted to embrace the whole student within a meaningful learning exchange to promote agency, advocacy, and activism.

Associated Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical underpinnings of my study are further informed by the literature on Indigenous cultural and racial identity, the field of maternal theory, and culturally relevant, revitalizing, and sustaining pedagogies. I also look at the importance of decolonizing pedagogies. Together these key theoretical areas contribute to the foundation of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy by supporting the three aforementioned strands: cultural identity, Homeplace, and Maternal Essence. Here, I present the work that expands those three strands to draw attention to the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as it relates to the concepts addressed in Research Question 2: cultural identity development, holistic well-being, academic success, and community engagement.

Indigenous Women's Identities as Expressed by Indigenous Women

It is *only* through my culture that my woman's identity is shaped. It is the teachings of my people that demand we speak from our own personal experience. That is not necessarily knowledge that comes from academic study. (Monture-Angus, 1995, p. 29)

I understand Patricia Monture-Angus's words as an expression of the importance of reclaiming Indigenous women's identities by looking inward to cultural teachings and personal experiences. I share this sentiment with the students I teach as a way to inspire their own cultural identity development and connect it with their educational experiences. We all have personal experiences that shape our understandings of ourselves and the world around us. These understandings are integral to Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and cultural identity development. Indigenous women's stories present valuable teachings to which understandings of Indigenous womanhood are connected. In honour of Monture-Angus's words, I draw on academic and non-academic sources, including narratives and memoirs in my writing and teaching.

When I first sought to explore the barriers that Indigenous women faced in mainstream education, I was initially frustrated by the lack of scholarly literature I could draw from. At the same time, other opportunities and my own personal interests brought me to a variety of sources written by Indigenous women that were published outside traditional scholarly venues. What I found was deeply profound and inspired me to move further with my research. I found that Indigenous women's literature—including autobiographies, short stories, and poetry—expressed the social, historical, colonial, and political contexts of Indigenous women's identities. The literature also includes

Indigenous maternal identities, contemporary realities, and connections between the two. Powerful autobiographies include Maria Campbell's (1973) *Half-Breed* and Morningstar Mercredi's (2006) *Morningstar: A Warrior's Spirit*, which showcase the life stories of the authors who both overcame oppressive forces that led them to prostitution and addictions and their journeys toward recovery that brought them to their vocations as writers, mentors, and frontline workers. Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* (1983) and *Come Walk With Me* (2009) offer powerful narratives that highlight hardships to which many Indigenous women can relate, and also inspire hopes and dreams through examples of perseverance. The short stories of Lee Maracle and Beth Brant, for example, weave in cultural and historical memory and connect it with contemporary realities.

Poetry, from the earlier works of Pauline Johnson to the recent works of Chrystos and Marcie Rendon, also presents cultural teachings that connect past, present, and future. Indigenous women's literature also provides a space for presenting queer Indigenous theory and queer maternal theory by drawing on the work of scholars such as Beth Brant (1988) and Chrystos (1988). For me, this body of Indigenous women's literature has become a teaching tool that inspires cultural identity development while also complicating the patriarchal influences that have suppressed the variations of gender performativity within Indigenous communities. Moreover, by promoting understandings of racial identities, the literature also promotes student agency, activism, and advocacy. The literature serves as a mirror that allows Indigenous women to see their own stories reflected in texts and to know they are not alone in their struggles and their aspirations. It can also prompt students to look within themselves and re-connect with their own maternal traditions. Incorporating these narratives into curriculum fosters a safe

environment for women to bring their whole selves into the educational setting and honour the stories they carry within.

In addition to the above sources, I found that within Indigenous women's storywork (Archibald, 2008), there were powerful accounts of educational narratives from Indigenous women themselves (Anderson, 2000; Kovach, 2009; Monture-Angus, 1995). More recently as a doctoral student, I have come across new studies that focus on Aboriginal women's educational narratives specifically (Bonnycastle & Prentice, 2011; Lavell-Harvard, 2011). These stories connect historical and contemporary realities and prompt the necessary inward look embedded in cultural identity work. The stories also encourage connections between Indigenous maternal teachings and the need to honour voices within. Thus, these recent studies along with Indigenous women's storywork provide a sound foundation for my engagement with the literature on cultural identity development and holistic support for Indigenous women in universities.

In *Strong Women Stories: Native Vision and Community Survival*, Anderson and Lawrence (2003) extended the work of Anderson (2000) by exploring "where our communities are now and where we want them to go" (p. 11). In this anthology, Anderson and Lawrence asked, "What are Native women doing for themselves, their families, their communities and Nations as we recover from the past and work towards a healthier future?" (p. 11). Anderson and Lawrence noted the difficulty of bringing together a collection of diverse voices that explore the varied experiences of Indigenous women. They advised, however, that the stories, as diverse as they are, are connected through "the fallout of colonization and the challenge to rebuild" (p. 12). In *Life Stages and Native Women: Memory, Teachings, and Story Medicine*, Anderson (2011) built on

her earlier work by exploring “how changing roles and responsibilities throughout the lifecycle of girls and women shape their identities and their place in Indigenous society” (p. 6).

Also focusing on life stages in Indigenous women’s identity development, Devon Mihesuah (2003) described young adulthood as an important life stage. She advised that young adulthood is a confusing time for students, especially Native students:

Natives also face a curriculum more strenuous than they have been exposed to previously. In addition, they must deal with language barriers, insensitive professors, and lack of mentoring. Often their family encourages them to attend school but at the same time confuses them with remarks about “turning white” and “acting like they’re better than everybody else. (p. 33)

Mihesuah, however, pointed out that Indigenous women can be empowered through educational programming that is culturally relevant and influenced by “Indigenous scholars for the purpose of tribal nation-building and appreciation of tribal traditions and concerns” (p. 32). Today as a growing number of Indigenous women are entering academic institutions (Statistics Canada, 2016), there is an increasing need and opportunity for scholarship that advances Indigenous women’s identity development. Because universities have seldom been conducive to instilling positive and healthy self-images, and continue, in many ways, to portray harmful images of Indigenous women (Anderson, 2000; Mihesuah, 2003; Monture-Angus, 1995), literature and research by and for Indigenous women can be positioned as a progressive form of resistance that cultivates and promotes well-being and community healing.

A. Wilson (2004) presented a holistic model of Indigenous women's cultural identity and well-being noting that there is a reciprocal relationship to the health of an Indigenous women's family, community, and nation with the women's individual well-being. She also noted the importance of "maintaining balance between all aspects—physical, mental, emotional and spiritual—of their being" (p. 21). Her work on the connection of Indigenous women's cultural identity and well-being is foundational to understanding the need to embrace and support students' cultural identity in connection with supporting holistic well-being. As A. Wilson concluded, "the women's identities are inseparable from their family, history, community, place and spirituality, and understood in the context of their whole lives" (p. 21). Her work reaffirms the importance of offering Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a space that honours the many facets of one's identity and lived experiences and encourages meaningful connections to the cultural, political, historical, and social contexts of identity and community.

Cultural and Racial Identity

To deepen my understanding of cultural identity theory as it applies to Indigenous learners, I have also familiarized myself with the work of other scholars in the area of cultural and racial identity. Verna St. Denis (2007) presented a critical race analysis to advance the need for anti-racist education. Her work on identity politics troubles the notions of "authenticity" and "belonging" (p. 1069). These issues of identity politics permeate Indigenous sense of identity and are rooted within colonial history as Indigenous community units have been dismantled through colonial interference. As one example, St. Denis draws on the legacy of the Indian Act to demonstrate the patriarchal influences that determine who is and who is not Indigenous. Moreover, St. Denis

expressed that identity politics shape the academic experiences of Indigenous students and call for anti-racist education. As she stated, “race matters because members of society have internalized racist ideas about what skin colour tells about the value and worth of a person or a group of people” (p. 1071). For Indigenous peoples in particular, racist ideas have been used to justify the colonization of Indigenous peoples and the practices such as those employed in residential schools that are deeply connected to contemporary experiences of cultural shame. The racialization of Indigenous students along with the presence of cultural shame must be understood in relation to notions of identity and belonging. Thus, anti-racist education is essential in unpacking the racist ideas that have led to the oppression of Indigenous peoples and in promoting the development of cultural identity.

Perry Horse (2005, 2012) is a Kiowa scholar whose expertise in racial identity development from an American Indian perspective offers valuable insights that shape my understanding of the scholarship on identity development. In 2005, he contributed to the field by writing that Native American identity is multifaceted. He outlined the complexities associated with Native identity by drawing attention to the following factors: ethnic nomenclature, racial attitudes, legal and political status, cultural change, and personal sensibility. He also offered recommendations for administrators, teachers, and higher education practitioners. As Horse expressed, “the emergence of American Indian political and economic strength is contributing to the development of an American Indian postcolonial sensibility that is in turn helping support the growth of a renewed American Indian consciousness” (p. 65). He also drew attention to the diversity among American Indian nations, noting that identity is highly personal. Thus, as he pointed out,

even though Native Americans share many commonalities, especially in consideration of the above-noted factors, “the practical benchmark for Indianness is the political distinction that tribes enjoy as sovereign nations” (p. 67). The following words by Horse (2005) capture the essence of my understanding of Indigenous identity:

Identity, our sense of who we really are, lies in the self image inherited from our ancestors and passed down along a tribal memory chain. So long as that memory chain remains unbroken, we can stay connected to what our Elders called the tribal spirit force. (p. 67)

Extending this work, Horse (2012) also highlighted the importance of understanding ourselves in relation to the modern world by presenting a thematic model of “Indian” identity. Although Horse advised that a “sense of Indianness is rooted in the past,” he framed his thematic model in terms of “stages of consciousness” (p. 109). These stages include race, political, linguistic, and cultural consciousness. He asked, “What is it that helps us navigate comfortably through this techno-multicultural world while retaining essential aspects of our ‘Indianness’?” (p. 109). I connect his question with Anderson’s (2000) identity formation theory as her model takes Native women through stages that prompt the contemporary application of traditional teachings. The application of Horse’s work with Anderson’s theory provides theoretical grounding specific to the realities of Indigenous women’s identity development within academic contexts. Moreover, Horse’s work strengthens the rationale for my research as he connects identity development to economic recovery, and recovery to nation building. My work is also aimed at economic development and nation building through the promotion of

Indigenous women's academic success. This vision of success involves the development of strong cultural identity and self-empowerment.

The work of Bonita Lawrence (2003) and Pamela Palmater (2011) also informs my research on cultural identity development for Indigenous women. Like St. Denis (2007), their work is particularly useful in identifying the ways Indigenous women's identities have been externally defined through state policies such as the Indian Act. Most notably, Indigenous women's identities have been shaped by the discriminatory provisions of Section 12(1)b of the Indian Act that took away a woman's Indian Status if she married a non-Status man. The removal of a woman's status also involved the removal of a woman's rights to band membership, including access to community resources and the right to live with her community (Palmater, 2011). Although Section 12(1)b of the Indian Act was successfully repealed in 1985, Indigenous legal scholars and activists continue to find new forms of discrimination that complicate understandings of Indigenous identity. Lawrence (2003) draws attention to the internalized oppression, rooted in these colonial policies, which continues to create divisions within Indigenous communities. Lawrence's work is particularly important as she underscores the need to understand the colonial and racist notions of identity that were introduced by the state distinct from Indigenous traditions, such as measuring identity based on blood quantum. As Palmater (2011) points out, if Aboriginal identity continues to be determined through colonial constructs, "questions of identity will be resolved by the courts instead of by Aboriginal peoples" (p. 21). Palmater's work encourages Indigenous communities to look back and consider the way community membership was traditionally viewed and suggests that we return to our own modes of determining membership.

The work of Jo-Anne Fiske (2006) is also important to inform an understanding of Indigenous women's identities in relation to colonial policies and state regulation. Fiske documented the ways Aboriginal women understand their identities in relation to the complexities associated with the intersection of federal and provincial policies that limit access to resources. Fiske brings an understanding to the "shifting identities" of Aboriginal women as understood through the removal and reinstatement of Indian status. She explained, "shifting ethnic identities both eases the burdens of state responsibility, and creates new racial tensions that cut through families and communities" (p. 251). As Fiske advised, many Aboriginal women, especially young mothers, find themselves falling "through the cracks" as they are "bounced between two systems" (p. 252). Research on Indigenous women's cultural identity should incorporate and present a deconstruction of colonial policies and state regulation in relation to the identity pluralities and complexities that touch the lives of all Indigenous women.

An understanding of multidimensional and "shifting identities" that address the intersections of racism and sexism can be found within the work of scholars of critical race and LatCrit theory (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2005). Delgado Bernal's (2002) work positions individuals as holders and creators of knowledge based on their lived experiences. Yosso (2005) brought attention to the intersections of racism and sexism as "layers of subordination based on immigration status, sexuality, culture, language, phenotype, accent, and surname" (p. 72). Moreover, Yosso described the knowledges that come from community cultural wealth and highlights the importance of honouring the knowledge of students and their communities as key assets within the learning environment. As both Delgado Bernal and Yosso draw on lived experiences through a

strength-based approach, I draw on their work to articulate the layers of Indigenous identities and associated lived experiences that contribute to teaching and learning engagement and allow many knowledges and realities to shape my teaching praxis. Indigenous identities are further complicated by political and legal definitions of status based on blood quantum, band or tribal membership, a sense of belonging in traditional societies and clan systems, and varying understandings and levels of acceptance for two-spiritedness. Identities are also complicated by geographical divisions such as living on reserve or off reserve and by “invisible boundaries” that politically separate Nations, such as the border between Canada and United States. Students have particular narratives that contribute to deepening understandings of cultural and racial identities that can add to a community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Moreover, as students bring their own realities into my course, it is integral that they can be their authentic selves and find meaningful experiences throughout the course as well as a safe Homeplace for participation and engagement.

Maternal Theory

The field of maternal theory is presented as a counternarrative to what is typically understood to be maternal. Thus, it challenges the heteropatriarchal understandings of motherhood and what it means to mother and act in maternal ways (O'Reilly, 2007). For example, Demeter Press includes publications on queer mothering (Gibson, 2014; Green & Pelletier, 2015), mothering and sexuality (Morrigan, 2012), other mothering (Walks and McPherson, 2011), and many other topics that contribute to advancing the field of maternal theory as one that is inclusive of the diverse perspectives and experiences associated with an empowered maternal theory. As O'Reilly (2014) expressed in

Mothers, Mothering and Motherhood Across Cultural Differences, “the chapters in this reader challenge the normalization of patriarchal motherhood in their refusal to restrict maternal identity and practice to one specific mode or model” (p. 4). O’Reilly continued by noting that “patriarchy resists non-normative mothering precisely because it understands its real power to bring about a true and enduring cultural revolution” (p. 5). Moreover, she drew on the words of Lavell-Harvard (2006) who stated “we, as Aboriginals, have always been different, we have always existed on the margins of the dominant patriarchal culture, and as mothers we have operated outside of, if not in actual opposition to, their definition of acceptability” (p. 6). Thus, while maternal theory presents a counternarrative to patriarchal understandings of what it means to be a mother, to mother, and to be mothered, the narratives of Indigenous maternal traditions have always existed outside the essentializing understandings of patriarchal motherhood. As such, Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy can only be understood within the Indigenous worldviews that honour the many understandings of what it means to be a mother, to mother, and be mothered (Anderson, 2007).

As I described in Chapter 1, the course text *Redefining Motherhood: Changing Identities and Patterns* (Abbey & O’Reilly, 1998) advanced my understanding of “Maternal Epistemology,” which the editors defined with respect “to know[ing], understand[ing] or claim[ing] a particular authority and knowledge based on experiences of mothering” (p. 330). Moreover, *Maternal Pedagogies: In and Outside the Classroom* (Byrd & Green, 2011) has informed my articulation of the relationship between mothering, teaching, and learning. The teaching and learning models presented in their text offers pedagogical approaches to “‘maternal’ ways of constructing and transmitting

knowledge” (p. 1). Byrd and Green’s text includes several chapters that present useful strategies for engaging the “whole student” (p. 16) and promoting agency, advocacy, and activism. I draw on these strategies, which I described in greater detail in Chapter 1 and connect them with the aforementioned work on cultural identity and culturally relevant pedagogy to inform my developing praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. Thus, Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy connects Maternal Pedagogies with women-centered Indigenous epistemologies that embrace the “whole student” within educational contexts. This unique pedagogical approach promotes the cultural identity development of students, encourages a safe Homeplace for ethical dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners, and also fosters agency, advocacy, and activism through shared Indigenous maternal teachings and contemporary realities.

Culturally Relevant, Sustaining, and Revitalizing Pedagogies

This section highlights the importance of pedagogical approaches that are culturally relevant, sustaining, and revitalizing. This work informs Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as all approaches are emancipatory and seek to legitimize, strengthen, and revitalize cultural knowledge within teaching and learning environments. This section also draws on the work of Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) to highlight the importance of honouring Indigenous values when conceptualizing pedagogical approaches for Indigenous learners particularly for promoting cultural identity development, holistic well-being, academic success, and community engagement.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) presents culturally relevant pedagogy as a “theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that

challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (p. 469). In conceptualizing this model of education, Ladson-Billings asked two important questions that are relevant here: “What constitutes student success?” and “How can academic success and cultural success complement each other in settings where student alienation and hostility characterize the school experience?” (p. 469). These questions are important to a vision of culturally relevant educational experiences for Indigenous women in light of the multiple sources that attest to the nature of universities as unwelcoming and hostile to Indigenous learners (Hampton, 1995; Kanu, 2011; Kovach, 2009; RCAP, 1996).

As Ladson-Billings (1995) points out, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy serves as a vehicle to promote a sense of cultural pride. She drew upon the example of one teacher who based her curriculum on the community in which the school where she taught was located. The students in her course used historical archives and conducted interviews with long-term residents of the community, and residents knowledgeable in the historical development of the community served as guest speakers in the class. At the end of the project, the students made a presentation before the City Council and Urban Planning Commission. This curricular approach serves as a great example that can be adopted in other classrooms to promote cultural pride and cross-cultural understandings as well as community involvement and activism.

Extending the work of culturally relevant pedagogy, is the work on culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) and culturally sustaining revitalizing pedagogy (McCarty & Lee, 2014). Paris (2012) described culturally sustaining pedagogy by suggesting that there is need for a framework that is “more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people” and supports “young people in

sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (p. 95). McCarty and Lee (2014) further develop culturally sustaining pedagogy by expressing that such an approach must also include a culturally revitalizing pedagogy. They offer teaching an Indigenous language as an example of culturally sustaining revitalizing pedagogy. As they explain, teaching language is inextricably linked to cultural identities as cultural values are instilled in language and language-based methods. I connect their work to St. Denis’s (2007) articulation of cultural and racial identities because the need to not only sustain but also revitalize must be understood within the racialization of Indigenous peoples that has led to the repression of cultural ways of knowing and the complexities of identity and belonging within Indigenous communities. As McCarty and Lee stated, “teaching the language is also associated with creating a sense of belonging for students—a way to strengthen their cultural identities, pride, and knowledge of cultural protocol” (p. 110). As they explained, teaching the language involves the protocols of the language, and understandings of the “connections among language, culture, and identity” (p. 110). The work on culturally relevant, sustaining, and revitalizing pedagogies informs Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy by presenting approaches that resist the deficit understandings of success and centre community knowledge as cultural strengths.

I also draw upon the work of Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) who discuss “the implications of the ‘Four Rs’ of respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility” (p. 6) as they apply to Aboriginal peoples’ experiences of higher education. Kirkness and Barnhardt point out that these “Four Rs” are integral to ensuring that universities are

meeting the needs of Aboriginal students. They express the importance of ensuring that universities are meeting the needs of Aboriginal students as follows:

We see the university from a perspective in which what it has to offer is useful only to the extent that it respects and builds upon the cultural integrity of the student. The university must be able to present itself in ways that have instrumental value to First Nations students; that is, the programs and services that are offered must connect with the students' own aspirations and cultural predispositions sufficiently to achieve a comfort level that will make the experience worth enduring. (p. 3)

Kirkness and Barnhardt further explain the need to move beyond simple notions of access by drawing attention to the need for safe environments where Indigenous learning can occur:

If we cannot create an environment in which First Nations students begin to “feel at home” at the university, all the special programs and support services we can dream up will be of little value in attracting them and holding them in significant numbers. (p. 3)

Kirkness and Barnhardt's work offers valuable contributions to the creation and implementation of university programming that meets the needs of Indigenous learners and responds to their educational aspirations. I draw on their work to express the value of the “Four Rs” as they apply to Indigenous women's educational experiences. Their work also contributes to an understanding of the need for teaching and learning approaches such as Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy that provide safe Homeplaces for the delivery of Indigenous content and cross-cultural dialogue.

I extend the work of Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) to Sandy Grande's (2008) work on Red Pedagogy. Grande noted the importance of honouring Indigenous knowledges and worldviews, and that meeting the needs of Indigenous learners requires disrupting the colonialist nature of education and transforming institutional structures through decolonizing pedagogies. Thus, red pedagogy is "fundamentally rooted in Indigenous knowledge and praxis" and at the same time calls for the decolonization of education that "troubles the capitalist-imperialist aims of unfettered competition, accumulation, and exploitation" (p. 255). Grande's work is particularly important as she roots Indigenous praxis with decolonizing pedagogies that ultimately encourage the collective agency of Indigenous learners for revitalizing Indigenous communities.

Decolonizing Pedagogies

As Battiste (2013) explained in her critique of the current education system, the government of Canada has a fiduciary responsibility to ensure that Aboriginal peoples' treaty rights to education are honoured. Battiste asserted that honouring these treaty agreements must encompass an alignment with Indigenous visions of education. The Indian Control of Indian Education policy paper (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972) presented to the Ministry of Indian and Northern Affairs outlined a unified statement of education for Aboriginal peoples as expressed by Chiefs, Band Councils, and Education Directors. Highlighted in this statement was the desire "to give our children the knowledge to understand and be proud of themselves, and the knowledge to understand the world around them" (p. 61). Battiste advised, however, that the education system continues to serve as a "cultural manifestation of society" that "is hegemonically distributed within raced, classed, and gendered systems" (p. 159). She described this as a

form of cognitive imperialism in which “success has been closely associated with Aboriginal students losing their languages and cultural connections” (p. 162). Cognitive imperialism in the current education system, and its associated definition of success, is closely aligned with the intentions of the Residential School system, and therefore, the continued assimilatory effects of the Canadian education system are evident. Noting that “education is the belief in possibilities” and “every school is either a site of reproduction or a site of change” (p. 175), Battiste expressed her faith in the value of education for building community strength and capacity. She offered specific pedagogical directions towards decolonizing education that are useful to a vision of Indigenous women’s academic support. The very title of her book *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit* captures the power of education as a source of construction. In connection to my research, I connect nourishing the learning spirit to the development of cultural identity that promotes academic success and holistic well-being.

Within her discussion on decolonizing education, Battiste described the therapeutic nature of transformative education in which Indigenous educators draw upon traditional teachings to promote healing. This description of the therapeutic nature of transformative education captures the objectives of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, which aims to encourage positive self-images through the development of strong cultural identities and holistic support that reflects the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical elements of self. These traditional teachings are applied throughout the curriculum to encourage a balance between cultural knowledge that includes Indigenous worldviews and ways of being with the mainstream academic knowledge necessary for student success in Western institutions. It is difficult to envision such a balance within the

colonial education system. Therefore, the work of Battiste (2013) that articulates the need for a decolonizing agenda is integral to the continued success of the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. Battiste draws attention to the extent of transformation that must take place in the education system for it to nourish a learning spirit:

The key in designing meaningful education in Canada must begin with confronting the hidden standards of racism, colonialism, and cultural and linguistic imperialism in the modern curricula and see the theoretical incoherence with a modern theory of society. No theory of Canadian society exists that reflects its order as an eternal pattern of human nature or social harmony. In this predicament, education theory has to confront the line between truth and propaganda. (p. 29)

Extending this, Battiste draws attention to the imposition of a silent curriculum that is evidence of the continued assimilatory undercurrent prevalent in mainstream education:

The most important educational reform is to acknowledge that Canadian schools teach a silent curriculum of Eurocentric knowledge that is not accommodating to other ways of knowing and learning. Schools that attempt to impose Eurocentric homogeneity by standardizing domesticated curricula are a problem, for they are often at a loss as to how to integrate local content into their prescribed, standardized curricula. (p. 66)

Battiste also pointed out that achieving visions of change require the “unlearning” of “Eurocentrically educated Canadians” (p. 69). This vision of decolonization, then, is not described as an add-on or isolated program of study. Rather it involves the

transformation of the entire education system. She described such transformation as a benefit for all:

The Indigenous renaissance has shifted the agenda from recrimination to rebirth, from conflict to collaboration, from perceived deficiency to capacity. It is also witnessing the early shifts in university thinking from a defensive/assimilative story to a receptive transformative story which accepts that benefits to Aboriginal peoples are a benefit to the entire academic community and the multiple publics who look to elite institutions to lead and to listen. (p. 187)

I believe that it is through grand-scale transformation of education that Indigenous-centred programs, including Gidayaamin—which reflect localized realities and expressed educational desires, along with culturally relevant curriculum—can be fully accepted as university curricula. Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy may only reflect a small component of the decolonizing agenda that Battiste puts forth as it is not aimed at the total transformation of the education system but rather a smaller piece aimed at honouring and reflecting the teaching and learning needs of Indigenous women. Through the kind of large-scale decolonizing movement that Battiste described, however, Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy can flourish and serve as a model for transformative education.

Connecting the Literature to Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy

The above literature review presents the urgency of decolonizing education to meet the educational desires of Indigenous women. Curriculum can indeed be transformative and has the potential to shift education landscapes and, by extension, Indigenous women's realities. The RCAP (1996) positioned education as hope for the

future. The recent TRC Calls to Action express this hope for the future as well by urging postsecondary institutions to foster reconciliation through education. Extending this sentiment, Stonechild (2006) advanced the vision of education as the “new buffalo” that will bring prosperity and restore well-being within Indigenous communities. Battiste (2013) cautioned, however, that education must serve a decolonizing agenda that will nurture learning spirits.

I draw on several studies that also reveal the transformative potential of applying maternal theory within Indigenous contexts. I describe these studies here as they have had a significant influence on my exploration of the transformative effects of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a teaching and learning approach that nurtures the learning spirits of Indigenous women. The following studies present useful models for the application of Indigenous maternal theory within contemporary educational contexts.

Marlene Pomrenke (2011) employed a resilience framework within the context of culture and gender to understand students’ success along with the associated lessons that are passed down to their children. Pomrenke drew attention to internal resources (self-efficacy and internal drive) to understand the success of Indigenous women. She placed emphasis on women’s motivation to succeed, noting that their children inspired women’s internal drives. Extending the above, she pointed out that education was viewed as the vehicle for improving the standard of living that would have an intergenerational impact on their children. Pomrenke positioned women as agents of their own learning journeys, which are not separate from their children.

The work of Greenwood and De Leeuw (2006) emphasized the importance of fostering Indigeneity as a capacity-building initiative. Their focus on “fostering

Indigenous ways of knowing and being in Aboriginal mothers and their children” (p. 179) also informed the theoretical development of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. They proposed that “bridging Aboriginal early childhood education and development programming with programming that supports and fosters Indigeneity in Aboriginal mothers” (p. 179) may offer a solution to state intrusion into Aboriginal mothering. The success stories they saw in their participants expressed the potentiality associated with Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and the connection between academic success and the development of community capacity. By empowering Aboriginal mothers through their involvement in early childhood education programs, Greenwood and de Leeuw concluded that Aboriginal mothers will have the ability to “exercise strength and control in advocating for themselves and their children” (p. 179). This form of empowerment is essential for Aboriginal mothers who are parenting against many odds and under conditions of heightened scrutiny.

Lavell-Harvard (2011) described Aboriginal women’s academic achievement as transformational resistance that stems from an awareness of social inequities, and a belief in education as a vehicle of social change for Aboriginal families and communities. By sharing the success stories of Aboriginal women in university as a way to vision Indigenous family and community well-being, Lavell-Harvard captured the essence of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. As she expressed, the purpose of sharing the stories of the most successful is to promote a replication of their successes. Thus, her work in and of itself is a maternal act.

My research proposes that Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is a responsive vision to the above concerns. The focus on women as the first teachers of future generations is

embedded in my cultural understanding that restoring the well-being of Indigenous communities begins with the women. Thus, I present Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as an Indigenous women-centred pedagogy that promotes a decolonizing agenda. It aims to educate the hearts and minds of students in the spirit of advancing well-being within Indigenous communities. The value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy can be extended to all students and this reinforces the commitment to transform university landscapes (CAAS, 2002; Kanu, 2011). Thus, I position Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a nurturing teaching and learning exchange for all learners; one that can also serve as a critical anti-racist approach (St. Denis, 2007) by incorporating a balance of culturally relevant, sustaining, and revitalizing curriculum and simultaneously addressing the daily experiences of racism that stem from a “deeply entrenched racist ideology” that permeates education and the larger society. As St. Denis (2007) advised, “educators need to call for the widespread offering of a critical anti-racist education as a requirement at all universities across Canada” (p. 1083). For Indigenous learners, the curriculum furthers understandings of colonization and the ongoing effects that shape their contemporary realities but also supports an Indigenizing agenda that honours their experiences and Indigenous knowledges as key assets within the learning environment. Moreover, as non-Indigenous students are exposed to such a decolonizing and Indigenizing curriculum, and cross-cultural understandings are advanced within a nurturing pedagogy and safe Homeplace, universities may become more welcoming and socially just environments for all learners.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, to clear the path, I have documented the literature that shaped my theoretical approaches to exploring the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a holistic curriculum approach that honours the educational realities of Indigenous women as I considered the relationship Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy has with cultural identity development, holistic well-being, academic success, and community engagement. I hope this work provides a unique lens through which other educators can view culturally relevant curriculum as a benefit for all learners. The next chapter outlines my methodological approach to exploring the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

As an Indigenous student, emerging scholar, and aspiring professor, conceptualizing and articulating my research design, and ensuring it is grounded within Indigenous methodology, has involved a lot of reflection. My commitment to a decolonizing program of study and research is complicated, however, as I am situated within a mainstream doctoral program. I had to reach beyond the program to seek out resources to guide my decolonizing journey and shape my research design. I also had to listen to maternal energies and ancestral wisdom that affirmed I was on the right path. As an Indigenous doctoral student, I am not alone in my experience of being “self-taught” and having “little curriculum support for areas related to Indigenous concerns” (L. T. Smith, 1999, p. 135). My formal training as a doctoral student has been in mainstream research methods and it has been up to me to find my own grounding within Indigenous research frameworks. This has been difficult because I found more literature about Indigenous methodologies than about methods beyond data collection. Initially, I sought out a step-by-step guide for analysis, coding, and knowledge dissemination that I could draw on to inform my own approach and align with my decolonizing commitment. I reviewed Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies*; Denzin, Lincoln, and L. T. Smith’s (2008) *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*; Kovach’s (2009) *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*; and the work of other scholars in the field of Indigenous methodology (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2005; Steinhauer, 2002; S. Wilson, 2008). These works all draw attention to the need to carve out space for Indigenous methodologies within academia and highlight the principles that define Indigenous research frameworks such as reciprocity, respect,

relationality, and relevance. To articulate my own research framework, I describe how the aforementioned scholars shape my methodological understandings and how the principles they present frame my research commitments.

Although review of the above methodological resources guided my conceptual grounding within Indigenous methodology, I still yearned for sound direction on how to work with my data. As Kovach (2009) pointed out, the lack of written publications about Indigenous methods has much to do with the historical rooting of an oral culture and a limited history within academia. My initial difficulty in refining a decolonizing research agenda is echoed in Kovach's statement: "In crafting a research framework consistent with Indigenous epistemology and methods it complicates matters when there is limited literature to reference" (p. 129). As a doctoral student, I knew that it would be imperative for me to provide a strong articulation of my research framework by referencing academic literature. Kovach explained, "the manner in which the Western tradition confers legitimacy upon a specific method is through the theoretical and practical investigations emerging from research and its subsequent publication" (p. 128). Kovach encourages Indigenous scholars to contribute, noting that "part of our task as Indigenous researchers is to both use Indigenous methods and publish findings" (p. 129). Thus, Kovach not only acknowledges the lack of published literature about Indigenous methods, but also inspires Indigenous researchers to publish work that can serve as a platform for emerging researchers.

Kovach's work brought clarity and inspiration to my search as I found new ways to articulate my own methodological development. This work responds to her call to use Indigenous methods and publish them so they are available to other emerging Indigenous

researchers. Thus, I present Indigenous Maternal Methodology as the methodological framework that emerged and guided my study. Through Indigenous research methodology, I have not only conducted my research in a way that is suitable for my participants, but I also present this approach as a contribution to the advancement of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in academia. Furthermore, I present my work as Indigenous scholarship that is done *with* and *for* my Indigenous community. In response to Kovach's call to publish work that showcases Indigenous methodological frameworks, I am committed to publishing my work and contributing to the emerging dialogue and movement towards an evolving Indigenist movement (Denzin, Lincoln, & L. T. Smith, 2008).

In what follows I articulate an Indigenous Maternal Methodology and its application as a new and emerging research process. I outline why this methodological framework is best suited to express the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy by drawing on the work of Kenny (2004) and Steinhauer (2002). I continue by grounding my design within Indigenous storytelling methodology (Fitznor, 2012; L. T. Smith, 1999) and critical race-gendered epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Following this, I present my pilot study to outline some of the initial lessons that have informed this current research. I will then restate my research question and provide a detailed description of the research methods as they were carried out. I also discuss the ethical considerations that governed the research process.

Indigenous Maternal Methodology

Indigenous Maternal Methodology is a new and emerging process that I derived from my quest for an Indigenous methodology that, like Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy,

was women centred and aligned with Indigenous worldviews and maternal values. It aligns with the work of Kenny (2004) who put forth a model for a holistic approach to research with Indigenous women that “positions women in the centre of the design” (p.

36). Kenny proposed a model that includes the following principles:

- Honouring past, present and future in interpretive and analytical research processes including historical influences and intergenerational discourse;
- Honouring the interconnectedness of all life on Earth and in the community in research design and implementation; and
- Honouring the spiritual, physical, emotional and mental aspects of the person and the community in research protocols, methodologies and analyses. (p. 8)

Moreover, as Kenny articulated, “in a holistic approach, the fragmentation of life through separating and alienating policy processes will be bound back together with integrity” (p. 36). Indigenous Maternal Methodology honours the above principles and in doing so offers an Indigenous and women-centred framework that fosters a safe Homeplace for participants to share their stories and contribute to community and holistic well-being.

Much like Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, Indigenous Maternal Methodology is guided by an Indigenous Maternal Essence. Thus, it involves a nourishing and nurturing environment to gather stories that will potentially serve as educational seeds that lead to the healing and nurturing of others. As Steinhauer (2002) articulated, the development of Indigenous research methodology will serve as a source of enrichment for Indigenous communities. To establish a nourishing, nurturing, and enriching environment, I worked with an Elder (Grandmother Shirley) who offered the physical and spiritual maternal presence necessary. Moreover, I extended the lessons of Maternal Essence that emerged

during the pilot study. Grandmother Shirley guided this research in a ceremonial manner through smudging—a traditional cleanse that grounded us spiritually, physically, emotionally, and mentally—and offered her cultural and maternal wisdom during the sharing circles. The smudging ceremony honours the interconnectedness of all life and brought this sentiment into the research environment. She also took a prominent role in the sharing circles to facilitate a healing environment for the participating women. For example, at times, she asked questions to prompt conversation; sometimes these questions went beyond the research but fostered an enriching experience for the participants. This is integral to the principle of relational accountability (Steinhauer, 2002; S. Wilson, 2001) that speaks to a researcher's responsibility to be accountable to relations within the world around us. Grandmother Shirley also offered maternal teachings and additional ceremony that would not be appropriate to document here, but I note this to give the reader a sense of the way relational accountability was met throughout the research process. Indigenous Research Methodology can offer a healing environment that goes beyond the scope of mainstream research and this will take place in different ways in each research setting. Much like the principle of a traditional sharing circle, what happens in the circle stays in the circle, which means that certain exchanges were removed from the audio recordings, including smudging ceremonies and traditional opening and closings.

Indigenous Maternal Methodology is holistic in nature and informed by Indigenous women's cultural teachings and traditional knowledge. These teachings are passed down intergenerationally, embedded within women-centred creation stories and Indigenous maternal histories (J. Brant, 2014a; Castellano, 2000; Steinhauer, 2002).

Traditional knowledge is passed down from Indigenous Elders and also in dreams, visions, and blood memory (Castellano, 2000). Consistent with other Indigenous methodologies, Indigenous Maternal Methodology presents a reciprocal research environment whereby the research rests within an ethical commitment to contribute to Indigenous community well-being. Grandmother Shirley offered me personal and cultural guidance and support throughout the research process that helped me throughout research planning, data collection, and analysis, ensuring my own ethical commitment to honouring Indigenous research protocol. The women who participated in the sharing circles played a large role in shaping the research directions. By implementing this new and unfolding research design, I tap into the knowledge and educational stories the participants carry to present a unified research story that explores my praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. This approach fostered an environment for developing Indigenous maternal theory through the women's stories and Grandmother Shirley's contributions. Thus, my journey toward the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy has been a collective journey whereby I travelled with the women as the research took shape. To ensure an accurate reflection of their contributions and provide an opportunity for further insights, the women were also involved in the analysis through a feedback circle, which I describe in the research methods section as part of the member check process. Bringing the women back together also contributed to the relational accountability described above (S. Wilson, 2001) and allowed the women to see how their seeds of nourishment flourished into the larger research story. It was evident that the research process in its entirety became an enriching form of ceremony that honoured the women

through all phases and positioned them as co-constructors of knowledge that will be gifted back to the community.

In the spirit of Indigenous Research Methodology, this knowledge is intended to be a gift to the community. Much like Beth Brant (1997) expressed about “Native women’s writing as a gift, a give-away of the truest meaning” (p. 176), I present this process of giving back to Indigenous and academic communities as a maternal contribution in the form of a gift understood within the ceremony of a give-away. A give-away is a traditional practice that many Indigenous nations host in different ways. It typically takes place at celebrations such as graduations or weddings. A give-away ceremony is also part of the closing ceremonies of a traditional Powwow or Rounddance. All participants are to receive a gift such as clothing, paintings, or crafts. This brings the community together through a display of gratitude and generosity. By presenting this “research story” to the community, participants become part of a shifting academic landscape (Kovach, 2009) where ceremonies such as the give-away are honoured as a further expression of relational accountability. The participants in this research are integral to this process of the research give-away as their relationships within the community will strengthen extended connections between Indigenous communities and academic institutions. In this way, the participants and I collectively carve out spaces that will transform the university landscape (Kovach, 2009).

Why Indigenous Maternal Methodology?

As noted in Chapter 1 and 2, Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is inspired by the earlier narratives of Indigenous women gathered in my MEd work along with my doctoral experience of researching educational narratives, maternal theories, and

Indigenous and critical pedagogies. Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is a new and emerging approach to teaching and learning and required unique data-collection strategies that aligned with the cultural and maternal values of the participants. As a result, the participants' contributions have provided profound insights that will strengthen Indigenous women's pedagogy and methodology and inform new developments. Moreover, the holistic nature and nurturing environment established by Indigenous Maternal Methodology allowed me to gather integral pieces of the research story that may not have been shared in other research settings. In this way, through Indigenous Maternal Methodology, the women are indeed contributing to a shifting academic landscape (Kovach, 2009).

Indigenous Maternal Methodology was most appropriate for this study because, like Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, it is shaped by a legacy of Indigenous women's Maternal Essence. Thus, it is grounded within Indigenous scholarship and shaped by Indigenous women's traditional knowledge, which I described above as deriving from Elders' teachings, women-centred creations stories, dreams, intuition, and blood memory (Castellano, 2000; Steinhauer, 2002). It complements the teaching approach presented in my classes in its expression of the value of Indigenous maternal teachings and the connections these have to family and community well-being. Through these connections, Indigenous Maternal Methodology serves as a framework for presenting a concrete and viable research story that connects theory to practice. This research story will be gifted to the community to showcase the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy in a way that is accessible and demonstrates the community-building capacity of culturally relevant educational opportunities. By presenting the research story in this culturally appropriate

manner, it is my hope that it will reach out to the Indigenous community as well as future Indigenous students who may come to new understandings of the value of Indigenous education.

Indigenous maternal scholarship is founded on cultural understandings of the connections between past, present, and future. It is also founded on the cultural teaching of the need to look inward before one can look outward. This teaching highlights the importance of self-work. Thus, developing a culturally aligned research framework that fits within my commitment to presenting a decolonizing study has involved a lot of self-work. This self-work component is woven throughout the research as I have been traditionally taught that I can only speak from my own personal experiences. Honouring the voices of the participants is another key element of Indigenous scholarship. Thus, I am committed to present my research in a way that best presents the participants' experiences with Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. This unique research framework also aligns with the caution presented by Lavell-Harvard (2011): "In order to avoid the shortcomings of previous exploitative research methods, this study is based on the premise that we must give centrality to the stories of Aboriginal women whose experience we seek to understand" (p. 86). This dedication to the voices of my participants also governs my own research. By positioning Indigenous women at the centre of the research, like Lavell-Harvard's work, this study expresses my determination to honour Indigenous traditions, cultural integrity, and Indigenous research principles, and I ensured this commitment throughout all phases of this research. Simply put, my research was not done *on* Indigenous women; it was done *with* and *for* Indigenous women.

Indigenous Storytelling Methodology

In light of my desire to gain insights from my participants that will tell a story about their experiences of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, I considered two questions: What is the best approach to achieve my research goals to express the research story in a way that honours the participants? How can I share my knowledge in an academic context while keeping it grounded within my desired community outcomes? I present Indigenous Maternal Methodology as a research framework that aligns with the above-desired outcomes and honours the Indigenous research principles to which I am committed. With an understanding of the need to present a holistic research story that honours the participants' experiences, I drew upon the literature on Indigenous storytelling as research methodology.

Fitznor's (2012) work revealed the importance of narrative as a research framework for understanding the lived realities of Indigenous participants. Her work demonstrates how storytelling as research methodology is also related to identity work. She wrote, "We learn how individuals construct their identities and the conception of what community is from their stories" (p. 273). Moreover, I can connect with her work in relation to Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy in that she described narratives that delve into the myriad of experiences of Indigenous women's lives. Much like the stories I share in my Indigenous women's literature course, her description is of storytelling that includes the difficult stories, ensuring a true reflection of the array of Indigenous realities:

I have come to understand that the process of translating meanings and relevance embedded in our autobiographical stories/narratives into themes, issues and models can provoke a range of emotions from anxiety to dynamic living.

Indigenous scholars who favour a writing style that often includes our contentious and traumatic histories with colonisation and assimilation, in addition to culturally-specific stories, epistemologies and metaphors, are gaining credibility, and these writings add to the various forms of scholarly publications. (p. 273)

As Fitznor explained, her work is presented to showcase the narratives of Indigenous realities in the spirit of promoting awareness. In this way “the narrative then becomes an instrument to construct and communicate meaning and create, produce and disseminate knowledge” (p. 273).

L. T. Smith (1999) also writes about the power of storytelling within Indigenous research frameworks:

Storytelling, oral histories, the perspectives of Elders and of women have become an integral part of all Indigenous research. Each individual story is powerful. But the point about stories is not that they simply tell a story, or tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every Indigenous person has a place. (p. 144)

I relate L. T. Smith’s description of the power of stories, and the connection stories have to a collective story, to Indigenous Maternal Methodology. Thus, I work with the participants to present a collective story that presents pedagogical insights into culturally relevant programming for Indigenous women.

My research also presents a reciprocal relationship between the participants and me as the researcher. We all gain from telling and listening to educational stories. Creswell (2005) offers the following description to highlight the importance of gathering educational stories through qualitative research:

People live storied lives. They tell stories to share their lives with others and to provide their personal accounts about classrooms, schools, educational issues, and the settings in which they work. When people tell stories to researchers, they feel listened to, and their information brings researchers closer to the actual practice of education. Thus, stories reported in qualitative narrative research enrich the lives of both the researcher and the participant. (p. 473)

This description is particularly useful as it applies to the way the sharing circles were conducted to engage the educational narratives of Indigenous women. Some of these women, who are often silenced in mainstream education (Monture-Angus, 1995), have few opportunities to share stories and personal accounts of their experiences in classrooms and schools, or of larger educational issues. My design, therefore, was useful in peeling away layers of experience that remain largely unexposed or untold. The storied lives of Indigenous women gathered through the sharing circles provide deep insights by exposing layers of knowledge that might not otherwise be gathered in a mainstream research setting. In the sharing circles, the telling of stories also aligned with the reciprocal nature of Indigenous methodology as the women shared their stories not only with me as the researcher but also with one another or to “the eachother” (J. Brant & Anderson, 2012). This two-way engagement allowed for a synergy that got to the core of the power of story (Hodson, 2004). This process itself was healing and empowering for all participants in the circles and this was expressed in the feedback circle. In this way, the sharing circle components of Indigenous Maternal Methodology extend the maternal teaching and learning exchange that takes place in my courses as the sharing circles prompted further reflection, learning, and healing.

Critical Race-Gendered Epistemology

Like other Indigenous scholars (Kovach, 2009; Young, 2005), I have had to borrow from non-Indigenous research frameworks to conceptualize my research plan. In this way, my study was informed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous research frameworks. In particular, critical race-gendered epistemology offered unique methodological and pedagogical insights for my work.

As Delgado Bernal (2002) explained, critical race and race-gendered epistemologies emerge from particular social, cultural, and political histories that are different from the dominant epistemology. These marginalized ways of knowing are now emerging in academia and present a challenge to mainstream research frameworks. Critical race and race-gendered epistemologies position individuals as holders and creators of knowledge by offering “unique ways of knowing and understanding the world based on the various raced and gendered experiences” (p. 107). As Bernal notes, Latina/Latino critical theory (LatCrit) complements the work of critical race theory (CRT) by providing a strong gender analysis that acknowledges multidimensional identities and addresses the intersections of racism, sexism, and classism. This perspective is useful to understanding Indigenous women’s identities within the context of varying colonial and de-colonial experiences. Thus, there is a need to acknowledge the multidimensional identities of Indigenous women that will attend to shared commonalities and differences (Anderson, 2007; Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere Lavell, 2006).

Delgado Bernal’s application of LatCrit aligns with my work as she presents it as “an anti-subordination and anti-essentialist project that attempts to link theory with

practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community” (p. 109).

These three links also shape the intended outcomes of my research as I link Indigenous maternal theory to teaching and learning, draw from Indigenous women’s scholarship to inform my teaching practice, and envision this work as a bridge between the academy and the community. Thus, Delgado Bernal’s work provides guidance for my attempt to articulate these links as they relate to Indigenous women’s realities within academic contexts and the interconnected community outcomes embedded within Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy.

My development of Indigenous Maternal Methodology is also informed by Delgado Bernal’s (2002) Chicana feminist perspective, which “is grounded in the sociohistorical experiences of Chicanas and their communities” (p. 113):

Chicana feminist ways of knowing and understanding are partially shaped by collective experiences and community memory. Community and family knowledge is taught to the youth through legends, corridos, and storytelling. It is through culturally specific ways of teaching and learning that ancestors and elders share the knowledge of conquest, segregation, patriarchy, homophobia, assimilation, and resistance.... The knowledge that is passed from one generation to the next can help us survive in everyday life. (p. 113)

Much like Chicana feminist ways of knowing and understanding, Indigenous epistemologies are also shaped by collective experience and community memory. Community memory is understood as ancestral or blood memory, and historical memory. Indigenous knowledge is also passed down through storytelling and teachings that are shared by Elders. Through experiential learning, youth are prompted to find knowledge in

the life forces to which we are all connected. Indigenous Maternal Methodology is also shaped by these ways of knowing and being. The Maternal Essence that I refer to derives from ancestral and historical memory.

Delgado Bernal explained how the Chicana feminist perspective is applied to the educational experiences of Chicana/Chicano students to offer “counterstories” that often go unheard in educational contexts. For example, she noted that students apply the lessons learned in home and community when confronted with academic barriers. These survival skills help students navigate the daily experiences of racism, sexism, classism, and other “isms” that occur in everyday classroom settings. Similarly, the work of Lavell-Harvard (2011) presents strategies of success that Aboriginal women employ to navigate the oppressive relations embedded throughout their educational experiences. These success strategies become part of a larger narrative that can be captured through race-gendered epistemologies.

Much like the Chicana feminist perspective outlined above, Indigenous Maternal Methodology presents a different epistemological perspective and worldview for understanding the complexities of Indigenous women’s educational realities. Such a framework is needed to advance the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy because traditional Eurocentric epistemological frameworks often devalue the familial and communal knowledge that Indigenous students hold (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Moreover, as I explained in Chapter 1, I position this work through a strengths-based approach, and through Indigenous Maternal Methodology, I honour experiential and cultural knowledge as legitimate and valid forms of knowledge that serve as key assets within research and educational contexts. Moreover, embracing experiential and cultural knowledge through

Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy transforms the academic landscape by creating meaningful spaces for counternarratives and critical dialogue.

Pilot Study

My research framework was also informed by my pilot study, “Rebirth and Renewal: Finding Empowerment through Indigenous Women’s Literature” (J. Brant, 2014b) as I noted in Chapters 1 and 2. I drew on these initial findings as secondary data and I present my pilot study to showcase my initial research into the connection between Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as it relates to empowering the roles of Indigenous women as mothers and community members. The findings serve as a powerful counternarrative that identifies the three links described by Delgado Bernal: theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community.

This pilot study served as a smaller component of this dissertation research as it informed my research design and implementation and was also used as secondary data. I looked specifically at the impact of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy in the course *INDG 2P17 Reclaiming Indigenous Women’s Literary Traditions and Educational Aspirations*. I facilitated a sharing circle to gather narratives from students who had completed the course. Four students were invited to participate in the sharing circle. As a result of other commitments, only two students were able to participate with the Elder (Grandmother Lorene) and me. The small group allowed for a deep narrative to emerge that offered considerable direction for a larger study.

The following three questions guided the pilot study sharing circle:

1. What is the impact of culturally relevant and maternal-based curriculum on the empowerment of Indigenous mothering within an academic and community context?
2. In what ways does the delivery and the structure of the course content shape this empowerment?
3. In what ways does the course content (required readings, Anderson's theory of identity formation, audiovisual material, and class discussions) influence this empowerment?

To clarify my use of the term “empowerment of Indigenous mothering,” I looked at the connection between education aspirations as they relate to and may be motivated by the women's mothering roles. Their mothering roles included parenting children and also extended to their roles as community members and the work they were inspired to undertake within their community contexts. I drew upon an Indigenous ideology of motherhood (Anderson, 2007) and maternal pedagogies within Indigenous contexts and resiliency frameworks (Pomrenke, 2011) to inform my research.

The findings from the pilot study were profound and reaffirmed the importance of this dissertation research. Students who participated in the sharing circle expressed their experience of the literature course as a decolonizing journey. They described their connection with the curriculum and the reflection the course offered of their own realities. One participant noted feeling comfortable with her own feelings as an Indigenous woman upon taking the course while another noted a stronger connection to her community. One woman stated that she liked the course because it gave her a deeper understanding of the traumas we faced as Indigenous women. The participants described

their application of the course material to their roles as mothers and community members and underscored the importance of understanding community wellness within the colonial context that was discussed throughout the course. As noted earlier, the course was delivered through Anderson's (2000) theory of identity formation and the students applied the stages of resist, reclaim, construct, and act to their own lives. It was evident that the women were prompted to learn more about their own identities as Indigenous women and share this knowledge with their families and communities. The stories embedded in Indigenous women's literature served as a mirror into their own lives and allowed them to feel a sense of security with their feelings and a connection to Indigenous womanhood. Thus, the three links outlined by Delgado Bernal—theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community—were evident.

The pilot study was also an opportunity to define and refine pedagogical and methodological directions for the current research. Through the pilot study, I was able to see glimpses of my larger research plan. Moreover, conducting the pilot study and having it published in an anthology on Indigenous women's well-being (J. Brant, 2014b) provided evidence of the importance of my research. The research story that emerged from the pilot study was powerful, inspiring, and useful in conceptualizing the value of Indigenous-women-centred curriculum for Indigenous women. The women who participated in the pilot study had valuable and telling stories to share that offered insights into the impact Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy had on their educational experiences as well as their roles as students, mothers, and community members. It seemed important to gather more stories in this larger scale project to inform the praxis of

Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and inspire future educational developments to advance reconciliation for all learners.

When I implemented the pilot study, the purpose was to gather a story about the effect of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy within an academic and community context but I had not thought about this in terms of exploring the overall value in transforming the university landscape. Ultimately, the pilot study affirmed the importance of this research and I realized that there was more to the research story that must be shared. To strengthen the initial study, this current research was extended to a larger participant group and involved multiple data sources to gather a deeper research story.

Prior to the sharing circles for the current study, I already knew from the pilot study and the powerful testimonials students have shared with me that the curriculum has had a profound effect on their cultural identity development and this has fostered their academic success. As an active participant in the local Indigenous community, I have also witnessed my students becoming more involved with the community. I believed that what was already shared with me was only the tip of the iceberg and sought to expose a much deeper research story. I intended to gather all the pieces of this research story within the nurturing and comfortable environment established by Indigenous Maternal Methodology to gain a deeper understanding of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and the meaning and value it has for learners.

Restatement of Research Questions

Through the implementation of Indigenous Maternal Methodology, I explored the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and the value it has for learners. To get a sense of the value, I considered the impact it has had on cultural identity development, holistic

well-being, academic success, and community engagement. As noted in Chapter 1, my exploration of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy honour and embrace Aboriginal women's identities and roles as mothers, students, and community members?
2. How does Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy foster:
 - (a) cultural identity development,
 - (b) holistic well-being,
 - (c) academic success, and
 - (d) community engagement?
3. What improvements can be made to the delivery of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy?

With the insights gained through this exploration, I present a research story that will shape future developments for the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. I explored the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a transformative teaching and learning approach (Battiste, 2013) that “engages the cognitive, affective, and the symbolic domains of learning” (Tisdell, 2003 p. 43). My focus rests within an overarching decolonizing agenda that aims to promote the well-being of Aboriginal women through educational opportunities that contribute to Indigenous community well-being. I believe that Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy carries the potential to promote Indigenous women's well-being by helping them academically and culturally. This promotion of well-being extends to family and community well-being as it encourages and supports Aboriginal women in their roles as the first teachers of future generations

and leaders within Indigenous communities. For non-Aboriginal learners, I believe Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy promotes cross-cultural understandings that will encourage ethical classroom space. Extending this, I see the potential for Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy to break down cultural barriers among students to transcend into contemporary realities beyond classroom spaces.

Research Methods

To bring clarity to my research methods, I map out my steps in the following subsections: Working with an Elder, Participant Selection, Data Sources, Member Checks, and Data Analysis. In the final subsection, I articulate my commitment to “Gifting Back” this research within an Indigenous community context.

Working with an Elder

As I described earlier, working with an Elder is an integral component of Indigenous Maternal Methodology. Honouring the knowledge of Indigenous Elders is understood to be a core element of Indigenous methodologies and Indigenous worldviews. There are important protocols that should be honoured when working with an Elder. One common protocol is the offering of traditional tobacco when one is seeking guidance from an Elder. Other protocols involve hospitality and honouring the Elder’s time through compensation, lodging, and meals. These will vary depending on the context and research settings. Grandmother Lorene offered invaluable maternal and cultural guidance during the pilot study and her teachings reaffirmed my understanding of Maternal Essence and informed the development of Indigenous Maternal Methodology as she expressed the importance of women’s ceremony within educational settings as it relates to cultural identity development and extends to community well-being.

Grandmother Lorene has many local community commitments as a sought-out Elder and I was aware of that and felt that it was important to seek guidance from another Elder who was introduced to me by a colleague.

Chapter 9 of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014) notes the importance of honouring the role of Elders when carrying out research with Indigenous participants. It also outlines the protocol for working with Elders as follows:

Researchers should seek advice from the community and the Elders regarding the appropriate recognition of the contribution of Elders and knowledge holders, which may include providing honoraria, acknowledging contributions by name or, as directed, withholding the Elder's identity in reports and publications. (Article 9.15, p. 130)

Aligning with the above, when I approached Grandmother Shirley to participate in this research, I felt that it was appropriate to seek her guidance about how she would like her role to be defined and the extent of her involvement in the study. Thus, the consent process involved her input to ensure cultural protocol was followed; I left it up to her to decide if she should be considered a research participant and the appropriate consent process to follow. After sharing my research materials and having a phone conversation with Grandmother Shirley, we established her role as the Grandmother Elder and participant in this study, and she expressed her desire to be referred to as Grandmother

Shirley throughout the study. Any publications that may follow this dissertation will again require input from Grandmother Shirley about how she would like to be identified.

It was an honour to work with Grandmother Shirley and I believe that a lifelong relationship as a maternal mentor and supportive friend has now emerged along with cultural guidance and support that will go far beyond this study. Her cultural and maternal guidance in the sharing and feedback circles has also left a valuable imprint on the participants that will go beyond this study as well. I elaborate below where I describe my conversations with Grandmother Shirley.

Participant Selection

I selected participants purposefully to allow me to address my overarching research goal of exploring the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. In order to convey a powerful presentation of this pedagogical framework, I knew it was important to gather input from students who could describe their experience of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and offer sound directions that would inform the development of this emerging praxis. Thus, I sent a letter of invitation to all previous students who identified as Indigenous women and had completed one or more of the following courses: INDG 2P17, INDG 3P47, or INDG 3P80. Sending out the letter in this way allowed participants who were interested to self-identify. Some of the women were graduates of the Gidayaamin program and some had completed individual courses only.

I initially hoped to have approximately 12 student participants. In the end, 10 students responded affirmatively to the invitation: Sharon, Jessica, Leigh, Sherry, Angelica, Natalie, Sabrina, Shannon, Charity, and Laura. Most of the participants requested that I use their real names to acknowledge their contributions in this study.

Sharon and Natalie are pseudonyms that respect the confidentiality of the other two women. Descriptions of the participants are included in the Participant Profiles section of this chapter.

Data Sources

My data sources included student participant responses that were gathered during three sharing circles, written participation, the feedback circle, course material and assignments, conversations with the Elder (Grandmother Shirley) who provided maternal and cultural support for the overall research endeavour, and my ongoing reflective journal. I also drew from the pilot study as noted above.

Three sharing circles. I gathered student participant responses by facilitating three sharing circles, which were scheduled on the following dates: Sharing Circle 1: Friday November 13, 2015, Tecumseh Centre; Sharing Circle 2: Saturday November 14, 2015, Tecumseh Centre; and Sharing Circle 3: Saturday November 25, 2016 at the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre. As described below, one participant was unavailable to attend a sharing circle at any of these scheduled times and instead submitted her responses to the discussion questions by email.

I assigned participants to one of the three groups so that I could facilitate smaller circles of 3 students with Grandmother Shirley and me. This ensured a comfortable research environment and also allowed for thorough narratives from the participants. Each gathering was approximately three to four hours in length and engaged the participants in open-ended discussion about their educational narratives in relation to Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. There were 3 women participants in each sharing circle:

Sharing Circle 1: Sharon, Jessica, Leigh

Sharing Circle 2: Sherry, Angelica, Natalie

Sharing Circle 3: Sabrina, Shannon, Charity

To guide the discussions, I prepared a list of questions to prompt the dialogue (see Appendix A). For example, students were asked to share a bit about their educational experiences and describe what brought them to university and what their initial educational aspirations were. Participants were asked to describe their overall experience in my course(s) and differentiate it from other course experiences if applicable. They were asked to consider the effect of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy on identity development, self-empowerment, academic success, advocacy, and community involvement. Students were also given opportunities to describe their personal views about the course design, including course readings, delivery, and assigned tasks. I prompted students by asking them to describe a particular reading, course discussion, or assignment that may have had a meaningful cultural or personal impact for them. I also asked students to describe the extent to which their future educational aspirations have been supported or changed. Lastly, students were given opportunities to contribute input for improving Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and to add anything they felt would be beneficial to the study.

Of the 9 women who participated in the sharing circles, 6 of the women had completed the Gidayaamin program and the other 3 women had completed at least one of the three courses. The women's experiences in the overall program are reflected in the narratives as I had anticipated and therefore reference to the Gidayaamin program is noted throughout to bring clarity. In terms of my teaching praxis, these references to the

overall program and other courses in the program provide insights that foster my own growth and the delivery of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy.

Written participation. The 10th participant, Laura, was unavailable for any of the scheduled sharing circles but indicated a strong interest in participating in this study. I sent her the discussion circle guide by email, and she prepared written responses on her own. Laura met with me to bring her responses as well as her consent form and shared her desire to participate in the feedback circle. Her written feedback differed from the narratives of the other participants because she did not engage in the research in the same way. Laura did engage in the feedback circle with the Elder and the other participants, including the ceremonial aspects of the sharing circle, which prompted a deeper level of reflection where she could offer further insights.

The feedback circle. Once the three sharing circles were complete and the data had been initially analyzed, I invited all 10 of the participants to participate in a feedback circle along with Grandmother Shirley and me. During this circle, I presented the initial findings and prompted feedback to ensure the participants' contributions were accurately reflected. The feedback circle served as part of the member check process, and it was recorded and used as data collection.

The feedback circle was held on Friday May 20, 2016, at the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre. During this circle, the women were presented with the initial themes and asked to contribute further by identifying themes that I may have missed. In this way, the participants were invited to co-construct the research story along with Grandmother Shirley and me. Thus, in honour of Indigenous research principles, the participants were engaged in the data analysis to ensure my findings were authentic to their realities. It was

important that the developing research story accurately reflected the women's contributions; therefore, simultaneous data collection and group analysis was intended to enhance authenticity of the research story. Moreover, by seeking input and guidance from Grandmother Shirley, I ensured my findings were culturally aligned, accurate, and credible. This circle was an important phase that added to the trustworthiness and integrity of my data for both the participants, and the wider Indigenous and academic communities with whom this research will be shared.

With the exception of Sharon and Leigh, who were unable to attend, the participants came together for the feedback circle to ensure my initial findings were accurate and offered a true representation of their contributions. The feedback circle included the following participants: Jessica, Sherry, Angelica, Natalie, Sabrina, Shannon, Charity, and Laura.

The feedback circle was also a sharing circle, and thus began with a traditional introduction by Grandmother Shirley and a smudging ceremony. This circle took place outside in an area called "The Pines." This space is surrounded by pine trees and served as a neutral territory that provided a balance to the sharing circles that took place indoors. As several of the women indicated, it was very grounding to be out in nature and that the circle itself provided a form of self-care for the women (a subtheme that emerged during the feedback circle). I elaborate on this understanding of self-care in Chapter 6.

Course materials and task assignments. I also drew on my course materials from three courses: INDG 2P17 *Reclaiming Indigenous Women's Literary Traditions and Educational Aspirations*, INDG 3P47 *Indigenous Women's Literature: Activism and Empowerment*, and INDG 3P80 *Indigenous Mothering and Motherhood: Historical and*

Contemporary Realities. Analysis of course materials included course outlines, lesson plans, and task assignments. The course outlines and lesson plans along with personal course planning notes prompted me to reflect about the pedagogical choices I have made in subsequent sections of the courses. I reflected on these changes and the underlying reasons for the modifications. I also drew on personal reflections about my pedagogical approaches to course development and ongoing reflections about my teaching and learning engagement.

Conversations with Grandmother Shirley. Working with Grandmother Shirley throughout this research engagement has strengthened my connection with the Maternal Essence of this pedagogical approach. This is essential to Indigenous Maternal Methodology. I had conversations with Grandmother Shirley before and after each sharing circle, and during and after the data analysis. I did not record these conversations, but they did inform my researcher reflections and subsequent analysis. Moreover, the discussions with Grandmother Shirley guided and helped shape the research as it unfolded, ensuring that it was culturally aligned, and my journey with Grandmother Shirley ensured that I was connecting my cultural teachings as an Indigenous woman to my academic work. Grandmother Shirley also reminded me of the importance of engaging in self-care processes as I took on the researcher role. This kept me personally and culturally grounded so that I could carry out this work in a way that honours Indigenous maternal teachings. The maternal support offered by Grandmother Shirley also benefited my participants as she shared valuable teachings and conducted a ceremony (beyond the ceremonial elements of the sharing circle) for one participant who opened up about a personal issue. Overall, Grandmother Shirley's guidance and support

provided a comfortable research environment for the sharing circles and her involvement with all phases of the research process ensured that the maternal and cultural guidance integral to Indigenous Maternal Methodology was always present.

Ongoing research journal. Throughout the research process, I kept a journal to ensure I captured my ongoing research reflections, including reflections about my conversations with Grandmother Shirley. My research reflections were also supplemented by my teaching reflections as my teaching and research experience took place simultaneously. This ensured a holistic engagement that captured all of the elements of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. At times, I would come to powerful reflections while driving, attempting to fall asleep, or in the wee hours of the night when I would wake up at 3:00 or 4:00 a.m. and needed to find a pen and paper. My ongoing research journal was never a neat and tidy bound journal but rather several journals and many scraps of paper where I jotted notes throughout the day or in the late hours of the night. I consider these late night reflections that woke me to have come from the maternal and ancestral energies that guide this work. These reflections also became part of the data that informed the research story that I presented in the feedback circle with the participants and in this document.

Member Checks

Once I gathered my data, I prepared and organized it for member checks. I transferred the audio files from the sharing circles and my conversations with Grandmother Shirley to text data by transcribing the data myself into text documents. As I transcribed, I made notes of ongoing reflections that later contributed to my analysis. Once the transcriptions were complete, I conducted member checks to ensure the

participants were comfortable with the transcriptions and that I had accurately captured their contributions. A copy with individualized portions of the conversation was sent to the participants on February 12, 2016, using a pseudonym. At this point, the participants had the opportunity to have anything removed or added or provide further clarification to their contributions. Participants were asked to send all changes by Friday February 26, 2016, and I made initial arrangements to secure a date for the feedback circle, which serves as a second member check for the participants to contribute collectively to the emerging data analysis. I also reminded participants of the opportunity to decide whether or not they wanted me to use a pseudonym or their real name in my dissertation. The use of pseudonyms was further discussed at the feedback circle.

Data Analysis

The first phase of analysis occurred as I prepared for the feedback circle. I read through the transcriptions and Laura's written reflections to get a general sense of the data. Patterns within and between the three circles were apparent and the research narrative began to take shape. I then manually coded the data to get a sense of the themes from the women's contributions. At this point, I allowed the themes to emerge from the data without intentionally reflecting on the research questions. Although the responses naturally fit within the larger research questions, there were many other insights that emerged. Through this initial phase of my analysis, I could see clear links between the themes and my first two research questions. There were also two profound themes that called for further input from the participants. I discuss these two themes "Intellectual Discovery and Empowerment" and "Emotional Well-being" in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, respectively. These themes along with a list of all the other themes and descriptions were

put together on a document for participant feedback during the feedback circle (see Appendix B); I went through each one of these themes with the group to ensure that all participants felt the list aligned with their contributions and accurately reflected their responses. This also served as an opportunity for them to provide further insights.

Additionally, as I went through the transcriptions, I found it interesting that a significant number of women referred to a book that I assigned in the literature course *Sweetgrass Basket* (Carvell, 2005). As I will elaborate later, many of the women seemed to have made a personal connection to the book and several were prompted to pass the book on to family members. I wanted to explore the meaning of the sweetgrass basket further and decided to use it as a metaphorical representation of the lessons that the students have carried on their journeys within and beyond the course(s). This metaphor also helped to prompt answers to my third research question: “What improvements can be made to the delivery of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy?” Responses to this question are integral to understanding my developing praxis but the women provided few suggestions during the initial sharing circles. By prompting the students to reflect on their sweetgrass baskets as a metaphor that aligns with the more common understanding in education of the toolkit for success, I asked the women what else is needed or what else they would like to see in their sweetgrass baskets that would help them on their educational journeys.

The theme of the sweetgrass basket represented a maternal and spiritual element that could guide the research moving forward and I discussed this sentiment with Grandmother Shirley prior to the feedback circle. In addition, I put together a package for the women that included sweetgrass teaching and poetry from a book I use in my

literature course *Sweetgrass Grows All Around Her* (B. Brant & Laronde, 1996). By sharing this literature with the women, the circle felt like an extension of the course. Interestingly, this was not an initial intention of the feedback circle and it was not until we gathered and I began to read the literature that I realized I was indeed facilitating lessons as I would throughout my course. This provided another layer of the connection between my teaching and research that is consistent with Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as I was sharing maternal teachings that were appropriate for setting the tone of the feedback circle. This also affirmed another layer of Indigenous Maternal Methodology as I drew upon maternal teachings to establish a nourishing and nurturing environment.

After the feedback circle, I uploaded the text data to NVivo 11 qualitative research software (Creswell, 2005). NVivo 11 helped me to organize the data and other material into separate files to which I was able to draw connections during the next coding phase. I was also able to store ongoing memos and research notes as I sorted through the data. This was really helpful as I refined my initial coding several times.

I began a subsequent phase of data analysis by conducting another analysis that was informed by the feedback circle member check as well as new data that emerged in the feedback circle. This helped me get a general sense of all the data (verified and new) and identify new themes. I created memos in NVivo during this phase that prepared me to sort through the data and begin to generate codes (Creswell, 2005). I coded the data by drawing on the coding process described by Coffey and Atkinson (1996). I began with general level coding by organizing my data according to my research questions. Coffey and Atkinson describe this as “a useful preliminary to a more detailed analysis” (p. 35). This first level of coding came naturally and prepared me to move to a second level of

coding, which involved in vivo coding. This style of coding uses words or phrases derived from the data as the label for a theme or subtheme and therefore honours the words of the participants (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The women's narratives provided more detailed coding that contributed to new and emerging perspectives. Although these detailed codes helped me to map out the research story, it also resulted in a large number of codes that I cautiously refined into a manageable number. I then generated my themes through the above coding process to capture the elements of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy by paying close attention "to the categories of expression" (p. 35) that the participants presented.

I initially imagined that my descriptive codes and their associated themes could easily be organized within a visual and holistic image that presented the interconnections among codes and themes. Creswell (2005) described a hierarchical tree diagram that provides a visual display to map out thematic codes. My intention was to draw from this and connect it to the work of L. T. Smith (1999) who articulated the importance of presenting research in a way that is culturally relevant and accessible to Indigenous communities. Thus, I planned to work with the data to create a holistic research map that accurately captured the maternal and cultural essence of the participants' stories. This, however, was not the direction that I felt the research was pulling me toward. Rather, a very strong connection to the sweetgrass teachings became increasingly clear. As I was sorting through this material and considering what the significance of the sweetgrass teachings to this research might be, I approached Grandmother Shirley for further guidance. Our conversation affirmed that I was heading in the right direction by following a path presented by the sweetgrass teachings.

As I noted above, my initial analysis resulted in many themes and I spent some time refining the themes in a way that authentically represented the research story. At times, I felt as though I was putting together and rearranging puzzle pieces. The interconnectedness of the themes made it challenging to determine the best way to present the research story. Further reflection brought clarity to the research story as I was guided by the Sweetgrass lessons. Thus, I drew on the metaphor of the sweetgrass basket to present the research story. The final themes that emerged were divided into three manageable sections that, braided together, present the women's experiences as a journey with their sweetgrass baskets. The sections and themes are presented in three chapters. Chapter 4 "Gathering the Sweetgrass" includes Resilience: Indigenous Women's Journeys to and Within University, Educational Barriers and Disruptions, and Education as "The New Buffalo." Chapter 5 "Weaving the Baskets and Gathering Medicines" includes the following themes: Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, Foundation for Indigenous-Centred Learning and Success, and Transformative Learning. Chapter 6 "Carrying the Basket Home and Planting Seeds" includes the following themes: Cultural Identity, Community Involvement and Giving Back to Community, and Well-Being.

Gifting Back to the Community

As L. T. Smith (1999) stated, "sharing is a responsibility of research....For Indigenous researchers sharing is about demystifying knowledge and information and speaking in plain terms to the community" (p. 161). Thus, Indigenous research must be presented in a way that speaks to the hearts and minds of Indigenous communities. Connecting this research to my community and cultural teachings will allow for a holistic design and presentation that is best suited to meeting the needs of Indigenous women in

education (Kenny, 2004; Native Women's Association of Canada, 2009). As my approach aligns with the shift away from research *on* and *for* Indigenous peoples, to research *by* and *with* Indigenous peoples, I am committed to presenting my research through a process of "gifting back" in a way that is accessible to my participants and my Indigenous community (L. T. Smith, 1999). I plan to share this research with the community during a cultural social and dinner with an open invitation to the community. This "gifting back" component of my research is essential to Indigenous Maternal Methodology and I envision it as an extension of the ceremony that took place within the sharing circles. Therefore, it will involve specific cultural protocol. I will work with Grandmother Shirley to ensure this "gifting back" process is culturally connected, and will thus speak to the hearts and minds of the Indigenous women who participated in this study, the local Indigenous community, as well as those who may follow this research path in the future.

Participant Profiles

In this section, I introduce the participants to give readers a sense of the women to provide context for their stories and the voices that fill the following chapters. To give a general sense of the overall participant profile, it is important to note some defining features. The majority of the participants had two or more children, and one participant also had several grandchildren. One participant without children expressed a desire in becoming a mother one day and noted the importance of instilling cultural teachings in her future children. The participants ranged in age with some being in mid 20s, and others in their 30s or 40s. Some participants were single parents, and other participants were married. For some participants, their relationship status changed throughout the course of

the study. None of the participants identified as two-spirited and I did not ask questions about sexuality. I acknowledge this as a limitation of this study and elaborate on the complexities of the many identities of Indigenous women in Chapter 7.

As noted, 8 of the women have given permission to be identified for their contributions to this study. Sharon and Natalie are pseudonyms for two of the participants who do not wish to be identified by name. I introduce each of the women in alphabetical order (by name or pseudonym). I have taken care to respect the women's wishes about which details to reveal.

Angelica describes herself as a Mohawk woman with family ties to Six Nations of the Grand River. She completed a college diploma program before enrolling in the Gidayaamin program. Angelica describes herself as in a process of still finding out who she is as a Mohawk woman and expressed a desire to use her knowledge to give back to Indigenous communities. Angelica hopes to have children one day and highlighted the importance of being able to pass cultural teachings on to her future children. Angelica has accepted a position at a local Indigenous friendship centre where she works with urban Indigenous youth in an alternative education program.

Charity is an Anishnaabee woman, wife, and mother of two children. Charity already completed an undergraduate degree in International Business prior to having children. She expressed that being a stay-at-home mother brought her to the realization that she had completely lost her own identity aside from being a mother, wife, and housekeeper. She decided to return to school because she was looking for an opportunity to explore who she was and what it meant to be Indigenous. She saw the Indigenous

content courses as an opportunity for her own cultural development. Charity is currently employed at a local Indigenous organization.

Jessica describes herself as an Anishnaabee woman, mother of five, grandmother, auntie, wife, and active community member. She is from Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, and moved to St. Catharines because her husband accepted a position in the region. Jessica was accepted into the Sociology program and took several Gidayaamin courses as electives, which prompted her to officially enrol in the Gidayaamin program. She subsequently completed the Bachelor of Education in Aboriginal Adult Education program. Jessica aspires to be a teacher and is currently working at a local Indigenous organization.

Laura describes herself as a Métis woman, wife, and mother of two children. Laura completed her undergraduate degree as a part-time history student while working full-time in the service industry. She enrolled in the Indigenous women's literature courses as electives and described this as an opportunity to discover more about her Métis identity. Laura describes becoming more involved with the local Indigenous community after completing the courses and she hopes to continue her studies in a teacher education program.

Leigh is a Haudenosaunee woman and has taken on the role of step mothering four adolescents. As a young adult, Leigh had previously started an undergraduate degree, which she did not complete. Leigh decided to enrol in the Gidayaamin program as a mature student after several years away from university. Leigh completed the INDG 2P17 *Reclaiming Indigenous Women's Literary Traditions and Educational Aspirations* and continued her education by enrolling in a Mohawk Immersion Program on Six

Nations of the Grand River. Leigh actively works to bring healing to Indigenous youth and continues to advocate for youth programs. Leigh is also committed to language reclamation.

Natalie is an Anishnaabee woman registered to a Northern Ontario First Nation. Natalie enrolled in an undergraduate program and began university the year after she completed high school. She dropped out of the program and worked in the customer service industry for a few years before she received her status as a result of Bill C-31. She decided to return to university and enrolled in as many Indigenous studies electives as her degree permitted. As she described, this offered her an opportunity to find out more about her Indigenous identity as well as her future educational goals. Natalie intends to pursue graduate studies and work toward policy development for Indigenous peoples.

Sabrina is an Anishnaabee woman, wife, mother, sister, auntie, daughter, and community member. Sabrina described her journey to university as an opportunity to rebuild herself. Prior to university, she worked as a chambermaid and struggled to support her three children as a single mother. She described being frustrated with the lack of opportunity she faced but found support in the local Indigenous community. Sabrina completed the Gidayaamin program and the Bachelor of Education in Aboriginal Adult Education Program. Sabrina now works at a local Indigenous community organization and cofounded the Niagara Indigenous Women's Drum Circle Strong Water Women: *Zhoonge Niibii Kwe*. She described her work with the drum circle as her way of giving back to the community.

Shannon is an Anishnaabee woman and mother of two young women who she raised in the Niagara Region. Shannon was a young single mother who became very

involved with the local Indigenous community. Her children were raised with a strong sense of community and continue to be active participants at the local Indigenous Friendship Centre. Shannon describes her struggle with the Western education system and noted her desire to enrol in an Indigenous studies program. Shannon works with youth at a local Indigenous community centre and pushes youth to achieve education while honouring their Indigenous identities. Shannon expressed the importance for youth to find balance within two worldviews; a balance she found difficult in Western education.

Sharon came to Brock from a southern Ontario city and was studying with the goal of securing a position related to Indigenous community work. To support her educational goals, she spent half a year studying at a community centre on a local reserve and also completed work placements at a Sexual Assault Centre and a local Indigenous Friendship Centre. For Sharon, the courses offered her an opportunity to become connected to her Indigenous identity and understand experiences of her family members that were not discussed at home.

Sherry is a Anishnaabee woman who has lived in the Niagara Region for most of her life. She is a mother of two children and active participant in the local Indigenous community. Sherry began the Gidayaamin program while pregnant with her second child. Prior to enrolling in the program, she completed an Addictions and Community Service Worker program. After completing the Gidayaamin program, Sherry initially moved to her local First Nation community in Southern Ontario to pursue a position as a front-line worker with Indigenous youth. However, she subsequently returned to the Niagara Region to be with her family and is now applying the knowledge she gained from the

Gidayaamin program and the Addictions and Community Service Worker program in her current position working with Indigenous youth in the Niagara Region.

It is important to note that the following chapters are based on the narratives of the women who participated in this study. These narratives do not represent the educational experiences of all Indigenous women, but do offer a glimpse into some of the realities that Indigenous women experience and offer insights into the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy for these participants and its potential for other students.

Ethical Considerations

In this section, I outline the ethical considerations that I considered before moving forward. Specifically, I acknowledge my power relationships with the women who participated in this study. I outline the potential benefits of this research as it may contribute to Indigenous communities and postsecondary institutions and therefore enhance Indigenous women's educational opportunities. Finally, I revisit my commitment to "gifting back" to the community as it relates to ensuring the reciprocity of my research.

Prior to commencing this research, I obtained ethics clearance through Brock University Research Ethics Board (file number 15-026 MCGINN). All participants were provided with a letter of invitation that explained the spirit and intent of this study, the research process, their rights as a research participant, the consent process, as well as their right to withdraw from this study at any time. I also explained that participants had the right to decide whether they wanted me to use a pseudonym or their real name in this study and any subsequent publications.

It was important to acknowledge that I am closely connected to the women who participated in this study in my role as their past instructor, as well as my role as an Indigenous community member along with the participants. This close relationship raised ethical implications that I addressed in my research ethics application, acknowledged in my letter of invitation, and considered throughout this study. I was sensitive to the power relationship that existed between the participants and me, and I ensured that I followed the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)*, specifically Chapter 9, Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis People of Canada (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014). This statement emphasizes the importance of respectful relationships and “encourages collaboration and engagement between researchers and participants” (p. 105). The statement also identifies the following key principles that governed my relationship with the research participants: Respect for Persons, Concern for Welfare, and Justice (p. 109). These principles are important considerations that helped me balance the existing power relations. I discussed and acknowledged the relationship with the participants and the Elder to ensure that my participants were engaged in such a way that the research process became an empowering and mutually beneficial experience. From my perspective, the research process naturally became an empowering and mutually beneficial experience.

Within Indigenous research frameworks, personal ties and close relationships with the participants are expressed as strengths (Anderson, 2000; Kovach, 2009; L. T. Smith, 1999; Steinhauer, 2002; S. Wilson, 2001; Young, 2005). Moreover, within Indigenous

Maternal Methodology, relationship building within the context of Maternal Essence is paramount. Indigenous Maternal Methodology serves as relational inquiry that is invested in a commitment to the participants. The value of this is highlighted in the following words shared by Anderson (2000): “My relationships with the interview participants have been really important. We exist because of and for our relationships we hold with everything around us. Knowledge is therefore of no use if it does not serve relationships” (p. 46).

Extending this sentiment of the value of relational inquiry, Dunbar (2008) pointed out that shared life experiences or struggles have a significant impact on research relationships. As he explained, they provide insights that might otherwise be missed by outsider researchers:

There is a common experience/understanding between those who ask and those who are being asked. The subjects and the audience are not disconnected. They have similar lived experiences. Similar insights provide a window with which to share views without speaking, where a sound, seemingly inaudible to the unprepared ear, speaks volumes to a knowing listener, where the expression on one's face tells the whole story or a simple nod says, “I know where you're coming from.” (p. 90)

I have personally experienced this common sense of knowing within Indigenous academic contexts where shared life experiences exist. There is a general sense of understanding and interconnectedness and this can be healing, particularly within the context of promoting cultural identity and belonging. This is also true given the complexities of differences and varying identities among Indigenous peoples. Our shared

colonial histories and common contemporary struggles connect us to this sense of knowing as described by Dunbar. I believe this connection can be heightened by Indigenous Maternal Methodology as the cultural and maternal elements embedded in the sharing circle will enhance the research relationships.

This research also aligned with the core value of reciprocity outlined in Chapter 9 of *TCPS2*. Moreover, it was important that I expressed the reciprocal benefits of this research to the participants so they understood the value of their contributions in helping to shape relationships between their community and the institution and to inform Indigenous women's curriculum. I believe this understanding empowered them as engaged research participants and outweighed the power relationship acknowledged above.

Extending the value of reciprocity is my commitment to “gifting back” this research to the community. As outlined in my research methods section, the participants were engaged during the feedback circle where I presented a handout that outlined the initial themes and sought further input and clarity about the initial themes as well as the sweetgrass lessons that emerged from the sharing circles. This process engaged the participants to collaboratively shape the research story that is documented in this dissertation and will be presented to the community. Chapter 9 of *TCPS2* defines reciprocal research as “the obligation to give something back in return for gifts received” (p. 105). In honour of this core value, I engaged the participants through all phases of the research process. Moreover, the “gifting back” ceremony will allow the participants to see their gifts presented in a research story that is presented to the community for the participants have been invited to take part in this presentation as either co-presenters or

honoured guests. In this way, the research process will come full circle and the participants will see the outcomes of their contributions. Moreover, this approach extends and nurtures the relationships the participants hold with this study.

Overall, in my role as researcher and instructor, I have unique relationships with the women who participated in this study. I have considered the perceived ethical conflicts of these relationships. However, the work of Anderson (2000), Dunbar (2008), and Kovach (2009) confirmed that the importance of these relationships outweighs the potential risks and challenges of research in this context. The presence of Grandmother Shirley also helped to manage the power relationships so that the participants were comfortable with the entire research process. Moreover, by empowering the participants to engage in all phases of the research process, I ensured they understood the value of their contributions to improve Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and enhance curriculum development for upcoming students, especially Indigenous women. Finally, I presented my research commitments to them as grounded within the push for Indigenous research to be done with and for Indigenous women in hopes of instilling their sense of belonging and pride within this study. This was further emphasized by Grandmother Shirley who positioned their work as participants within the larger context of contributing to the betterment of Indigenous educational opportunities and, essentially, feeding the new buffalo.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has documented my use of Indigenous Maternal Methodology, a new and emerging research framework well suited to assess the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. This framework extends the work of Kovach (2009) who expressed the

potential for Indigenous research methodologies to transform a shifting academic landscape. I outlined the research methods employed to gather a co-constructed research story that honours the integrity of the Indigenous women participants and puts forth a collective vision.

To date, my work has involved a developing understanding of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a way to support the academic success of Indigenous women specifically. My desire is to share the connection between Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and Indigenous women's academic success, cultural identity, community involvement, and holistic well-being so the value of this teaching and learning approach can be understood. Prior to engaging in this study, I had already come to know the value that the Gidayaamin program has had on the women who have shared their stories with me. With this research, I sought to gather the stories of a larger group of women who have completed the courses I have taught within and beyond the Gidayaamin program. The following three chapters with the surrounding interchapters present the collective research story and express the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy.

Understanding the need to advocate for the educational rights of Indigenous women, especially through a cultural lens, is critical. Indigenous women's educational opportunities must encompass decolonization and support cultural capacity. I believe that the key to supporting Indigenous women in education, stems from not only understanding and honouring their educational realities, but also drawing on their inherent strengths (connecting to cultural identity) and fostering Indigeneity (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2006). As a doctoral student, I have attempted to move beyond advocating for Indigenous women's rights in education by drawing attention to the strength and resilience (the gifts)

that Aboriginal women have to share and contribute through their academic and community work. The following section presents the collective story that serves as an expression of the strength and resilience of my participants. It is my hope that this research story will inform future pedagogical directions to promote intellectual spaces for Indigenous women's curriculum such as Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. These are the spaces and Homeplaces in which Indigenous community well-being, empowerment, and capacity building can be inspired. With the recent TRC's Calls to Action (2016), some of which are directly aimed at postsecondary institutions, this research is timely. Thus, it is an opportune time for educators to consider bringing new pedagogical strategies such as Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy into classrooms that engage all learners in truth and reconciliation.

PEDAGOGICAL LESSONS OF THE SWEETGRASS TEACHINGS

Mrs. Dwyer made it very clear that,
while we may have things from home,
under no circumstances were we to have
Indian things from home.

My basket is not very large.

If I hold my hands together,

Palms up,

it will fit inside

the outside edges of my hands.

My mother made many baskets,

many larger than mine,

but the one she made for me

is just the right size

because Sarah

was able to hide it

in our satchel

and in our bureau

so she gave it to me

when I needed it most,

when I needed something,

something from home,

and because it is not too big,

I, too, can now hide it,

can keep it safe,

In my bottom drawer. (Carvell, 2005, pp. 109–110)

The following three chapters present the research story derived from the three sharing circles, written participation, the feedback circle, course material and assignments, the conversations with Grandmother Shirley, and my personal reflections as a researcher and course instructor. At times, I also draw on findings from the pilot study, including the lessons shared by Grandmother Lorene. This research is presented in storytelling form by allowing the women's words to guide the story. Woven throughout the chapters are quotations from Indigenous women's literature that illustrate some of the overarching themes that transcend literary works symbolizing the past, present, and future of Indigenous women's realities and cultural identities. The above excerpt is from Marlene Carvell's (2005) *Sweetgrass Basket*, a story that gently and eloquently offers a glimpse into the residential school experience through the fictional voices of two sisters. I assign this book in the Indigenous Women's Literature course (INDG 2P17). The themes of Maternal Essence, Homeplace, and Cultural Identity—lessons that I present in my courses—are embedded throughout *Sweetgrass Basket*. I will showcase literary excerpts throughout the following chapters to give shape to the research story and provide comprehensive insight about my delivery of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy.

My journey through the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy can be described best through the lessons of the sweetgrass teachings that emerge throughout Indigenous women's literature and the connections with the sweetgrass teachings that the participants described in the sharing circles. To demonstrate these connections, I begin by sharing the

following sweetgrass teachings from an anthology entitled *Sweetgrass Grows All Around Her* (B. Brant & Laronde, 1996):

Sweetgrass grows and remains a link to remembering tradition. For many Aboriginal peoples, sweetgrass is the hair of Mother Earth; it provides clarity of mind and it purifies us. The threefold braid of sweetgrass represents the integration of body, mind and spirit; it is also symbolic of community strength. One strand of sweetgrass is easy to break, but many braided together are strong. (Laronde, 1996, p. 1)

This link to remembering past can also be understood as an expression of the Maternal Essence of sweetgrass. Moreover, as the hair of Mother Earth, these teachings connect us all to our first mother. The following excerpt illustrates the cultural teachings embedded within sweetgrass baskets as they hold the spiritual knowledge of the grandmothers by connecting the past with renewed visions of the future:

Sweetgrass is a link to remembering our past and a process of recovery. The tall, fragrant grasses which are picked and cured at the height of summer in preparation for the burning, the soothing, the healing; the rituals which acknowledge and affirm the past while bringing forth a newly found integrity, focus and clarity. Encoded in these baskets is history not just of basket making but of a way of life. Reclaiming, recovering and honouring the work and knowledge of these grandmothers is at the core of this effort.

(Baird, Excerpt from “Memory Claim” cited in B. Brant & Laronde, 1996, p. 4)

By “honouring the work and knowledge of these grandmothers,” sweetgrass teachings also present empowering lessons of Indigenous womanhood: “A person who

travels the ‘sweetgrass road’ seeks to emanate qualities such as strength, rootedness, elegance and grace, flowing freely in life, and expressing a ‘shining out’, a radiance or splendour like the shimmering sweetgrass” (B. Brant & Laronde, 1996, p. 1).

As Beth Brant and Sandra Laronde articulate in the introduction to *Sweetgrass Grows All Around Her*, the collection expresses “maps of personal journeys and the compassion and strength of inspiring Native women” (p. 1). This, I believe, extends to the larger body of Indigenous women’s literature that I present throughout the courses I teach. The participants’ connections to the book, *Sweetgrass Basket* are profound and have enriched the outcomes of the research and my role as the researcher in powerful ways. Setting out, I had no idea that sweetgrass teachings would play such a prominent role in my journey towards the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. As I know, however, the lessons embedded within Indigenous storytelling unfold in meaningful and powerful ways and are typically not apparent early on. As I straddle two worlds by presenting this academic document in storytelling form, I recognized the importance of sharing a glimpse of the sweetgrass teachings at the outset within this interchapter.

I draw on the sweetgrass teachings by placing the themes in three chapters that, braided together, inform a holistic understanding of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. The following three chapters will map out the personal journeys of the women participants who continue to inspire my work and create empowered pathways towards an emerging praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. Through their journeys, the participants are inspiring other women as they contribute to holistic well-being within Indigenous families and communities. The intention is for the lessons to emerge throughout the following three chapters in a storytelling manner that honours the participants’ voices and

experiences. With this in mind, I ask readers to imagine the participants, each carrying a sweetgrass basket, as I trace the paths the women have walked on their journeys into and through education.

Chapter 4 “Gathering the Sweetgrass” presents the stories of the women’s journeys to and within university. Chapter 4 also presents the necessary background information for understanding the women’s experiences within the program or courses. To provide a sense of the research story, I begin with the theme Resilience: Indigenous Women’s Journeys to and Within University. This allows readers to understand what the women brought with them as their whole-selves and the ways that everything they carried in their baskets prepared them as they “gathered the sweetgrass” and began their educational journeys in university. I then briefly note some of the educational barriers that were discussed in the circles that also provide an understanding of their experiences. This background information lays the foundation for understanding the third theme in Chapter 4, education as “the new Buffalo,” which extends the work of Stonechild (2006) and expresses the associated tensions with the belief in Western education as a contemporary means of survival.

Chapter 5 “Weaving the Baskets and Gathering Medicines” includes the following themes: Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, Foundation for Indigenous-Centred Learning and Success, and Transformative Learning. This chapter helps readers to understand the Indigenous- and women-centred environment that is established within the space of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and provides a sense of the layered experiences that are woven into the sweetgrass baskets as well as the medicines gathered throughout the women’s journeys.

Chapter 6 “Carrying the Basket Home and Planting Seeds” includes the following themes: Cultural Identity, Community Involvement and Giving Back to Community, and Well-Being. This chapter serves as a representation of the women’s experiences as they carry the sweetgrass baskets home and implement the lessons (the medicines) in their families and communities. As the themes will showcase, the women have used their experiences to foster their own cultural identity, engage in community involvement, and plant seeds that nurture their communities and ultimately contribute to holistic well-being.

To bring the research story full circle, I present a final interchapter, “The Giveaway: Lessons of the Sweetgrass Baskets,” to offer profound insights into the value of Indigenous and women-centred curriculum as well as pedagogical lessons for my developing praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. This interchapter prompts the reader to reflect on what the women have placed in their baskets throughout their educational journeys and how they may carry those forward. Based upon the participants’ feedback, I also consider what other gifts, medicines, or pedagogical lessons would be useful to improve and better align Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy with the expressed visions of the participants. This research endeavour has also provided an opportunity for me to receive gifts, medicines, and pedagogical lessons as I have walked on my own journey through the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. Thus, I will also note the items I now carry within my own sweetgrass basket as I continue to journey forward.

In the spirit of reciprocity and gifting this research to the community, the lessons of the research story are presented for all educators as we collectively work through a

framework of truth and reconciliation that revitalizes the relationship between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of Canada.

CHAPTER 4: GATHERING THE SWEETGRASS

When a woman walks through the doors in the university she should have a PhD in survival. (Ilene, cited in J. Brant, 2011, p. 173)

I choose to begin with the above words shared by a participant in my MEd research because I think they speak to the depth of the journeys that Indigenous women have experienced before entering the doors of a postsecondary institution. As Ilene articulated, “one thing that we excel at in our communities, no matter what Nation [we] are from...we are survivors” (J. Brant, 2011, p. 173). Indigenous women’s journeys to university are quite different than the journeys of non-Indigenous students who are less likely to have experienced generations of suffering at the hands of educators and administrators and who may be less likely to experience the continued intergenerational traumas that permeate Indigenous families today and leave Indigenous youth in vulnerable situations associated with high rates of poverty, homelessness, and at times criminality. This notion is captured in the words of the late Patricia Monture-Angus (1995) who expressed:

I have often been amazed that I landed at law school in Kingston, Ontario, only eight blocks away from the federal Prison for Women. I have always felt that I should have properly landed on the other side of that high limestone wall. It was both anger and amazement that took me on my journey to university. (p. 48)

The belief in education that Indigenous peoples present today is marked by a deep and dark colonial history. A history that is collectively carried in the family stories of today’s generations of Indigenous students. I have documented this history in the literature review and it is also well documented in the recent Truth and Reconciliation

Commission (TRC, 2015) reports. This chapter, “Gathering the Sweetgrass,” showcases the resilience of Indigenous women who—in Ilene’s words—have continued to “walk through the doors.” This chapter includes the following three themes: Resilience: Indigenous Women’s Journeys to and Within University, Educational Barriers, and Education as “the New Buffalo.”

Resilience: Indigenous Women’s Journeys to and Within University

The focus of this dissertation rests within the larger narrative of reconciliation through education. Although they are only a piece of a much larger puzzle, I believe the participant contributions provide valuable insights about the importance of decolonizing and Indigenizing education. To elaborate, Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy offers a decolonizing space for “actively resisting colonial paradigms” and “reject[ing] colonial curricula that [offer] students a fragmented and distorted picture of Indigenous peoples, and offer students a critical perspective of the historical context that created that fragmentation” (Battiste, 2013, p. 186). As the women begin their journeys coming from educational experiences characterized by colonial curricula, the movement forward within an Indigenizing space is one that centres Indigenous worldviews, knowledges, and connections to land, place, and territory (Battiste, 2013; L. T. Smith, 1999). Thus, I begin this section by sharing a glimpse into their journeys to university as they not only walked through the doors but also “gathered the sweetgrass” to continue on their educational paths or to transition into the workforce. Here are some of the stories the participants carried with them as they walked through the doors:

What brought me to university? I graduated College in 2009 and I took three years off. I was working two part-time jobs and money was tight. It was hard and

I moved to Alberta. I was in a bad relationship that ended horribly and I started really questioning my own life, “What am I doing with myself? Am I going to work in these kinds of jobs and be in these kinds of relationships? Am I going to live for myself or keep living for other people?...I moved from Alberta to come home for the [Gidayaamin] program. (Angelica)

I decided to go to university because I was at a time in my life where I was just a crumbled shattered mess. My husband and I were trying to work through a miscarriage and I was not successful in building myself back up again. I knew I needed help and I didn’t know where to go and I always wanted to go back to postsecondary.... I started in the Gidayaamin program in 2012 and then transferred into the Aboriginal Adult Education program after that but what brought me to university was the desire to rebuild myself. (Sabrina)

When I started your class I was actually in an abusive relationship and it empowered me to start my life over. I was just starting over when I took your class, actually when I first took your class I had to drop it because I was just in the middle of it and I had in my mind that I wanted to take your class so badly because I want to find out about my roots I want to find out about my culture.

(Laura)

The real reason why I came to school, it was totally on a whim because I came to the Brock Powwow and I registered—but this is not my first time to university it’s my second trip. I totally believe in higher education and it’s something that I am so strong and supportive of. I push with my own children that they have to continuously be educated, but I really personally struggle with the Western

education system, and I have right from elementary school through high school and various alternative education programs. So, I was glad I went on impulse because if I would have given it too much thought I probably wouldn't have registered. I just jumped in and that's how that started. I know I'm not done but I have got back to that point where I can get back in there and get things taken care of. (Shannon)

The above quotations present expressions of the women's struggles as they sought out new directions by enrolling in a culturally relevant education program. Leigh added to this by noting that, similar to Shannon, this wasn't her first trip to university and the demands of juggling her responsibilities as a mother and partner who also wanted to learn her traditional language hindered her success. The following quotations showcase the desire to learn more about cultural identity through Indigenous studies courses. Such a desire was indeed part of many of the women's initial journeys to university.

I went back to school, I already completed a degree at Guelph and then I had my children and was at a point when I realized I had completely lost who I was independent of my family and the other roles that I was serving as a mom and a wife and a housekeeper. And I was looking for an opportunity to explore who I was and what it meant to be Indigenous and I thought I could do university, I had done that. Learning is something that I am okay with and I enjoy and I like the structure of school and I felt that it provided me a safe space to learn that with less judgment. I thought there would be less judgment approaching my identity that way as opposed to trying to go through family where that identity had been cut off. (Charity)

I decided to minor in Aboriginal Studies and learn more about my culture because I knew absolutely nothing. My Grandma passed away in 2011 so before I really learned anything she had died, so at this point in my life I wish I could go and ask her about her life a little bit more, but that's not possible now. (Natalie)

I moved here because my husband got a job here and I was accepted into the Sociology program. That was what brought me to Brock and I took all the classes in the Gidayaamin program.... That kind of changed my whole outlook on everything, that whole year, because it was my journey to find out who I was and the classes provided me with some stepping stones of understanding what I didn't know about myself because I didn't grow up learning about that. I'm now in the Bachelor of Education in Aboriginal Adult Education. (Jessica)

Sharon's experience was a bit different as she did not initially begin university with a desire to learn more about her cultural identity. She stated she was generally interested in Indigenous women's issues but did not identify with her Indigenous roots as she comes from a "predominately settler" background. She articulated, however, that the Indigenous women's literature course prompted her to explore her own Indigenous identity and consider the "erasure of culture" within her own family.

For Sherry, the decision to enrol in university was based on her success in a college certificate program:

My education journey started a couple years back.... I took an Addictions and Community Service Worker program and it was only a 10-month course but that kind of reaffirmed for me that education was something that I can do. (Sherry)

Sherry continued by explaining that she was inspired by another community member who had been accepted into the Gidayaamin program:

I applied and I got accepted but I almost didn't make it. First of all, the first month of university, I had a two-month old. I had gotten pregnant during the application process and I had already said to myself "I don't care I'm going" and then funding fell through. And then I think it was actually the very first day of the Gidayaamin program that I got a call or the day before and I got funding and could go.

The decision to begin a university program is difficult for Indigenous women, especially if they are raising young families. Thus, the decision requires the support of those in one's immediate family and the sacrifice of much time and energy; however, as the following exchange that took place between Sabrina and Grandmother Lorene during the pilot study showcases, the decision to return to school is an important time for a woman. Sabrina shared the following:

I'm on this healing journey. I'm thankful for a lot of things along the way. I'm thankful for what I'm being taught but I'm also thankful that my husband and my children allowed me to go on this journey. I was able to step out of the role that I was in. I was cleaning hotel rooms and it was not a happy job but that's what I did to provide for my family and I say all the time I recognize the sacrifices they made because they were so used to me being one way and then all the sudden I go on this journey and I'm somebody totally different and they're excited about the changes but at the same time I never would have been able to do that if they weren't supportive and encouraging of me so it's kind of like a balancing act like

I'm really happy for what I'm learning in school but I'm also really happy that I've been given the chance by my family to take that journey. (Sabrina)

In response to Sabrina, Grandmother Lorene shared the following maternal teaching:

This going to school is just like your moon time where you would go to a women's lodge and learn all about all life skills so when you went back the absence would make your partner and your children appreciate you more. Now you have passion and the children feel it and your partner feels it. Now you got that, your fire, it's been burning now and...everything is affected by it.... The creator gave us those five days.... He gave us that time to go off to the women's lodge and we would learn from all the other women "this is what happened in my family this month and how do I deal with it" so what you are reading, when you go to class and what you are getting is almost like a teaching lodge. You're getting time away...time to mature your seed and so they are just so happy because they feel that happiness from you and even though sometimes they begrudge you from going they'll remind you "oh mom" but you watch when you go and when they become parents or adults they're going to talk to you about that and it's such a reward you know hearing them come up to you later on and say "mom you're the one that inspired me to be who I am" that's what they're going to do because you showed them how you went from a place of unhappiness and not satisfied to go and be determined to go get something that you want that brings life to you, so not only your family benefits but your community.

(Grandmother Lorene)

Grandmother Lorene's support for education as well as her encouragement for the women in the circle is evident in the above exchange. By connecting it with the women's lodge, a vision of education as a culturally safe space for personal development becomes clearer. As the following comments confirm, personal enrichment was a motivating factor for many of the women:

I think for me personally it was just being able to get back into school and having something to be proud of for myself. So, taking back who I was as a person and doing something that would better my future because I knew I wanted to learn more about my culture and do something that would better my family because I wanted to make a difference in my life.... And the one thing I realized was that education was the one thing that I have control over. No one can take that away from me; that was my journey. And that was where I could really, you know, excel as a person, and do something. (Sherry)

It was basically when my funding came in that I decided to go because it was a chance to I guess just take advantage of that. And also, I was working and not really doing anything with my life so that's why I [started school] and it's been a lot more eye opening I guess. I was a totally different person in first year than like where I am now and I have direction in my life. (Natalie)

I was hired at my job as a very young adult and about 10 years ago I had realized that my job had no meaning to me. Perhaps a means of financial stability; however, not something I am proud doing. I turned to University as a way of finding myself not only as a student but finding a place in this world. My intention was to become an educator; however, my university experience has led

me on many different paths of which I am still in the process of discovering.

(Laura)

The participant profiles outlined above express the varying realities of Indigenous women's journeys to and within universities. I have decided to group these comments as a standalone theme because they offer important insights into the unique educational experiences of Indigenous women. For many students, the decision to attend postsecondary education is part of a life plan or life stage as one moves into adulthood (Anderson, 2011). This life plan was expressed by the participants, but as evidenced in the above profiles, it took place at different, yet profound, times in their lives; thus, this life stage or rite of passage into university served as a transformative experience, for some leading them on a new path, and consistent with Grandmother Lorene's teaching, it could be considered a form of ceremony. The participants' educational journeys began much earlier than their first steps through the university doors for the women's experiences were shaped by the many life events noted in the participant profiles. Within Indigenous worldviews, women's experiences are also understood to be shaped by the blood memory of their maternal ancestors (Castellano, 2000). This chapter is only a glimpse into those journeys and the pathways the women continue to trace with their sweetgrass baskets in hand, carrying lessons of the many women who have come before them clearing paths for future generations.

As Sylvia McAdam, Founder of the Idle No More movement, eloquently stated, "Like anything, a journey begins somewhere perhaps even before a person realizes their path. Idle No More resistance began long before in different names, different locations through the generations since the arrival of Europeans" (McAdam, 2014, p. 65). The Idle

No More movement was generally understood as a call to protect forestry and water but in many ways extended from pressing environmental issues to human rights concerns as well. Sabrina's experience in the Gidayaamin program, similar to many of the participants, can indeed be understood as a journey that began long before she realized the path she would travel. Sabrina expressed her experience as a revelation:

I took this probably a little bit more of a revelation because 2012 was when Idle No More happened but it was also the year that I took the Gidayaamin program—they were saying the world was supposed to end that year in 2012 and I remember being at City Hall in Niagara Falls and I was like I don't really know if the world is going to end or not it could possibly because people were saying it for a long time. And we were drumming in front of city hall and I thought to myself "it's not the end of the world, it's just the end of the world as I knew it to be" and all those things played into it because during the winter break at school I was somewhere every day with Idle No More. I went all over the place and so many things happened. Like also being in university at that time helped, and it really wasn't the end, but a new beginning a whole new world. (Sabrina)

Idle No More marked a profound moment for Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island. It was indeed a profound moment for me and has shaped my teaching in particular ways, as the movement reclaimed and redefined the political power of Indigenous women specifically and Indigenous peoples generally. In December 2012, I participated in several "flash mob" round dances intended to educate and draw attention to these larger issues that should be a concern for all. I attended the round dances with my children, who also sang and danced in their regalia, and I watched with pride, a feeling that is hard to

put into words, as so many young and old Indigenous peoples, babies and Elders, came together during the movement. I also participated in teach-ins where I stood alongside students, colleagues, and community members to draw awareness to the federal government of Canada's omnibus Bill C-45. These lessons were also brought into my role as an instructor as we debriefed on the movement but also connected it to other resistance movements such as the 1990 Oka Standoff, a land claim dispute in Oka, Québec between the federal government and the Mohawks of the Kanesatake and Kahnawake reserves (Simpson & Ladner, 2010). The protest of a golf course expansion and development over Mohawk burial grounds drew national attention and I recall as a young child participating in a community vigil to support the land defenders who were exposed to horrific violence. Today as I'm writing this, another movement is occurring as Indigenous peoples gather and stand, physically and spiritually, with the Standing Rock Sioux Nation in North Dakota who are currently protesting the development of the Dakota Access Pipeline. I facilitate discussion on these movements as I encourage students to think about the complexities associated with reconciliation. These resistance movements are nothing new and as such are intertwined in Indigenous women's literature as Indigenous women resist environmental exploitation and reclaim their roles as water protectors and caretakers of the land. What is new is the ability to spread awareness through social media and thus the momentum for resistance movements becomes stronger than ever and has gained support from around the world. Many of the students in the courses, especially during the year the Idle No More movement began, became informed and involved, and some forever changed. As McAdam noted:

I am forever changed by Idle No More. This journey has not ended; it's still unfolding as I write this. My journey takes me back to my people's lands and waters; it is in the lands and waters that Indigenous people's history is written.

Our history is still unfolding; it's led by our songs and drums. (p. 67)

Likewise, Sabrina expressed that she has been forever changed by her experience in the Gidayaamin program. Her journey is also one led by songs and drums as she applies her knowledge within the community and her work with the Niagara Women's Drum Group.

This introductory theme is foundational to understanding the subsequent themes as well as a developing praxis that responds to the unique educational desires of Indigenous women. The remaining themes across these findings chapters document the barriers along the path, the medicines gathered along the path, the sweetgrass baskets carried along the way, as well as the seeds that are planted for future generations.

Educational Barriers and Disruptions

Although my focus in this particular study was not specifically on the educational barriers that Indigenous women face in university, dialogue on the barriers came up several times during the sharing circles. In this section, I identify the barriers that were raised by the participants despite not being asked about them. The following list, however, is not exhaustive; for a more thorough discussion about the educational barriers faced by Indigenous women in university see J. Brant (2011). This theme includes the following subthemes: Discouragement, Funding, Parenting, Language, and Struggles with Western Education.

Discouragement

As noted earlier, it takes a lot of courage for an Indigenous woman to consider pursuing postsecondary studies. For some, those seeds are never planted to encourage education. In fact, several of the women talked about being discouraged to even consider university. As Angelica explained:

I had teachers in high school say I would never go to university and I was more of a college level you will never be able to handle university—and that discouraged me a lot and then when I got back to school and I took your program and realized “I can do this.” It’s what you put in and then when you’re empowered and have that holistic education and you are free to have an opinion...education means so much more...you really do thrive.

Discouragement was also expressed by Sabrina who noted that she never had anyone who believed in her. However, as Laura noted, seeds of encouragement can come from within and “you’re able to do it and despite everybody telling you that you can’t, you find it in yourself.”

Funding

In my position as the Program Coordinator for the Gidayaamin Program, I became well aware of the funding barriers for Indigenous women. Although there are some funding opportunities available, many women fall through the cracks or, for varying reasons, are ineligible. Moreover, funding is especially difficult for women with young families. Sherry and Natalie both noted struggles securing funding, although this wasn’t prompted by the research questions. Both women were able to enrol in a university program because they were able to access funding; however, there are many others who lack funding. Many applicants who were accepted in the program were unable

to register as they were denied funding opportunities. Thus, the small numbers of students in the Gidayaamin program attest to the lack of funding for Indigenous learners.

Parenting

Parenting, as a barrier to pursuing education, was seldom discussed in the sharing circles. However, Sherry noted that she began the Gidayaamin program when her son was an infant. As she noted, having a newborn was certainly a consideration, but her decision to go through with the program was based on her determination. The Gidayaamin program, inspired and informed by my master's research, was designed to honour the unique needs and family responsibilities of students. Indigenous frontline workers who participated in my master's research highlighted the "paradigm shift" necessary for creating an Indigenous environment. As Michelle articulated, the ability to welcome and embrace children is integral to Indigenous environments and programs. Such environments must embrace the "systems of kinship and caring and valuing children and honouring people who are doing that work and mothering" (J. Brant, 2011, p. 186). Extending this, Valerie described how centring children worked in a Native Teacher Education program, noting that "it changed the quality of [the] program, it really brought our students and staff together because we had a responsibility for our baby" (J. Brant, 2011, p. 187). The Gidayaamin program has welcomed several babies and many young children who became part of the class environment. For example, several of the students began the program while pregnant and all instructors in the program, aligning with the vision of Gidayaamin, have allowed students to bring their infants to class. This kinship concept is more accessible off campus. For example, the Gidayaamin program has been delivered at a community organization and one of the instructors purchased a

playpen for the use of two students who frequently brought their infants to class. On campus, babies were typically kept in strollers or held during lessons. This is generally understood to be accepted within Indigenous contexts as noted by Kim Anderson who recalls being inspired by the late Patricia Monture:

Perhaps what impressed me most about Trish was the way she incorporated children and mothering into every part of her life. Watching her do things like give a keynote with her five-year-old playing on the floor beside her gave me permission to bring my children to places like the Congress of Social Sciences and Humanities.... Patricia's practice taught me something about Indigenous parenting styles and philosophies of childrearing. That is, children in "traditional" Indigenous societies were always present in adult work environments, because that is how they learned, took on responsibility, and contributed to community. (J. Brant & Anderson, 2012, p. 205)

The lesson expressed above is one that I present in the mothering course specifically, but it is not limited to that course. In all of my classes, I work with students to honour and embrace familial responsibilities as part of establishing an Indigenous-centred environment.

Language

Language was raised by several students during the circles as they talked about the experience of learning how to introduce themselves in their traditional language and they described how empowering this was for them. I discuss the connection between traditional introductions and empowerment further in the cultural identity section in Chapter 6. Leigh noted her frustration with the lack of language opportunity and exposure

in mainstream education. She pointed out that the Gidayaamin courses, along with a supportive friend and community, encouraged her to enrol in a Mohawk language immersion program. She stated it was a difficult decision to leave Brock to complete another program but the cultural teachings embedded in the program encouraged her to honour her cultural identity: “I can now find almost like worth in knowing my language.” However, the lack of language opportunities is still a source of frustration for Leigh:

Tell me for what, how many people are working in language opportunity careers in the Niagara region none, what opportunity does that bring you? What opportunity does a university diploma bring you? A lot more than learning the language does if you were to ask anybody.

Leigh left Brock to study the language, knowing that she had to do that for herself, her family, and her community with the goal of language preservation. Her decision is a bold resistance to the lack of language opportunities. Ultimately, Leigh felt that the importance of preserving Indigenous languages outweighed the lack of opportunity within mainstream society.

Struggle with Western Education

This subtheme is included in the barriers section because for some students the struggle with Western education presents itself as a deterrent to pursuing postsecondary education. For many, it is a struggle that exists throughout public school along with the myriad of socio-economic factors that serve as barriers to access and success (see J. Brant, 2011). Thus, as Ilene (a participant in my MEd research) implied in the quotation that opens this chapter, it takes a great deal of strength and resilience to simply “walk

through the doors.” This subtheme includes the struggle with Western education and a conversation on the need for cross-cultural dialogue.

The struggle with Western education was noted by Shannon: “I really personally struggle with the Western education system and I have right from elementary school, through high school, and various alternative education programs.” Shannon shared a common sentiment that has inspired the push for Indigenous-centred curriculum and her appreciation for Indigenous content:

For me I think that whole concept that the curriculum was totally based on Indigenous knowledge, not just your course but all the courses in that program, were totally intriguing to me because like I said I struggle with the Western education system. So, I thought well here is a program that is totally designed for somebody like me and I thought this is going to be great and it was really something that I felt like I needed.

Several of the women also talked about the lack of a safe space for cross-cultural dialogue in their mainstream courses. This was expressed as a struggle or barrier to class participation. As Jessica noted, “this is why I switched from Sociology and took the Gidayaamin and Bachelor of Aboriginal Adult Education program.”

Other women noted that having non-Indigenous students in the Indigenous studies courses at times served as a barrier to participation and changed the classroom dynamic. These comments provide valuable insight into the need for safe Homeplaces for cross-cultural dialogue as well as the need for such dialogue to take place prior to postsecondary education to offset a larger narrative filled with preconceived notions. For example, as Leigh expressed:

You open the courses to non-Indigenous people, and...you have more people who pick it up as electives so they come in and you see people who you don't know, you're now engaged and having to be vulnerable...do I say something do I not say something, that feeling of worthy and unworthy, am I safe am I not safe, I don't know who these people are.

Although Leigh noted a hesitancy that disrupted the safe space environment, she continued by drawing attention to the value in these cross-cultural environments: "You're making connections with people, but also, they're bringing perspective that people in your own community might not have, so now you're seeing things through a different lens and hearing different opinions." Leigh's comment alludes to the growth that can be achieved within a safe space of cross-cultural dialogue. The following comments express different views on having Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the courses:

I want to be inclusive, but I feel my experience in the classroom was hindered by having non-Aboriginal people in there only because I didn't feel like I could fully open up with a true understanding and say what I wanted to say without judgement. Because for the most part when you're in a room with Indigenous women I can say whatever I want to say because there is some form of relation and form of understanding going on and on the same token they need to be there to hear it as well. (Sherry)

I loved having the spaces of Aboriginal women in class now it's getting different as we're moving up because more non-Indigenous people are taking the courses, which is okay because it's important for them to learn as well but there's so many ignorant people in the classes now who say so many dumb things.... I guess it

depends who the instructor is and how they handle.... [In one course,] it was really uncomfortable you can see a lot of people... getting heated just because of certain comments that were made. (Natalie)

There was a conversation that hit me pretty hard in your class and another student who said something like “These books are so sad. Why are these books always so sad, never any positive, it’s really depressing to read this?” and I felt like my fire was burning so hard and in my mind I thought “oh you want to talk about happy ending you know it must be nice to live in a world where there’s some happy ending sister because since I’ve been on this earth there ain’t been no happy ending, struggle after struggle after struggle” and I was burning, and it was fueling my passion, it was fueling me. (Leigh)

The above comments attest to the importance of establishing a safe space for emotionally charged dialogue. Everyone in a course is there to learn new lessons and many of the lessons in these courses are eye opening, especially for non-Indigenous students who may be exposed to Indigenous content for the first time. In some cases, there may also be a need for students to get uncomfortable in order to reach a new learning curve or experience “aha” moments. As Morningstar Mercredi, author of *Morningstar: A Warrior’s Spirit* (2006) pointed out during her keynote at the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women’s Conference (2008), “The issues we talk about makes some people uncomfortable, well I’ll tell you what get uncomfortable!” Mercredi’s statement echoes Kaomea (2003) who stated, “It is time to tell more uncomfortable stories” (p. 23). As Kaomea expressed, if we only focus on the positive elements of Indigenous culture, the colonial injustices that have been done to Indigenous peoples

continue to be denied. It is in these comfortable spaces of uncomfortable dialogue where empathy and compassion can confront colonial injustices and seeds for social change can be planted.

It was evident that the women cherished a space that was for them and this was complicated by opening the courses to non-Indigenous students. However, as Leigh pointed out, there was value within the cross-cultural dialogue and, as Natalie noted, it is important to have an instructor who can ensure an ethically safe space for such dialogue.

Education as “The New Buffalo”

Education is the most powerful institution in any society, and teachers are its most powerful agents. As Aboriginal people we know this very intimately. Education has been a force of destruction. It is also a powerful source for construction, and it can produce citizens who are capable of determining their own future. (Williams, 2000/2008, p. 145)

The aforementioned words are echoed by a recent statement made by Justice Murray Sinclair who declared “education is what got us into this mess—the use of education at least in terms of residential schools — but education is the key to reconciliation” (Watters, 2015, p. 1). These statements are strong articulations of the belief in education as a source of healing for Indigenous nations. This belief is captured in the expression of education as “the new buffalo” (Stonechild, 2006). Stonechild’s work identifies a strong-held belief in the importance of education as a contemporary means of survival. As Stonechild articulated, however, much work needs to be done for education to truly be “the new buffalo.” This belief guides my approach in this work, as I discussed with Grandmother Shirley prior to the sharing circles and with the participants in my

introduction to the sharing circles as a rationale for exploring and better understanding Indigenous educational opportunities generally and Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy specifically. This theme documents the contributions related to understanding education as “the new buffalo” within the following subthemes: Belief in Education, Encouraging Family and Community to Take the Course or Program, Feeding the Buffalo, Visions of Success, and The Irony of Reclaiming Culture in a Mainstream University.

Belief in Education

“I totally believe in higher education and it’s something that I am so strong and supportive of.” (Shannon)

“My vision going through school has always been to get some form of education to help my people and bring me back to my people.” (Sherry)

The belief in education was expressed by all participants. It is important to note, however, that their belief in education appeared to be associated with Indigenous curriculum as well as the desire to contribute to community well-being and social change. As Natalie expressed, “I’m hoping to go to grad school next year for policy writing so I’m hoping that that’s something that will affect the community once I reach the workforce.” Charity, Sharon, and Sherry also indicated the desire to apply for graduate studies and Jessica and Laura to a teacher certification program.

It was evident that the women also instilled this belief in their children. Sabrina became emotional when she expressed that her initial educational aspiration was being able to tell her children that she went to university. Likewise, as the following quotation indicates, it was important to Sherry for her children to see her success in education:

What inspires me, two things mainly, first to be a role model for my children because I am the first in my family to graduate from high school, the first in my family to get a college degree, and the first in my family to have a university degree.... and those four little eyes looking at me, because I do believe that education is the new buffalo. It's what is going to sustain us and.... I just want education, higher education to be a normalcy for my kids; instead of something that they think they can't obtain.

Shannon also drew attention to the importance of opportunities for her children to bring their cultural identity into their studies: "I always tell them they're in school and they can bring their identity and their culture into everything they're doing whether its English whether it's cooking they just have to tweak it a little bit." Sabrina noted the subsequent impact her educational success and satisfaction (which relate directly to her belief in education) has on her children:

The content and the courses are so important so when my children grow up and go to university wherever it's nice to know that these kinds of courses are going to be offered. Now my son wants to go to Brock because of my experiences at Brock right, where previously if I would have went to postsecondary right out of high school I don't think I would have enjoyed it at all because I probably wouldn't have taken any kind of Indigenous courses.

Although these contributions attest to the belief in education with particular reference to it as "the new buffalo," it is evident that this belief in education rests in a vision of decolonized education with Indigenous content and curriculum. As expressed by the participants, this vision includes a space where their children, for example, can

bring their cultural identities into any program of their choice. As Charity explained, her belief in education was inspired by the personal connection she found within an

Indigenized curriculum:

I think for me my experience was a bit different because it came from that developing identity and connection to spirit and then developing thought from a different perspective so the thoughts and the intellectual ability had more of a connection to who I was as opposed to “this is what the textbook said and it’s something very outside of myself.” Once you start connecting with all of that stuff and then developing thought it has so much more power to it because then you believe in it and it comes from more places more experiences and you have the freedom in these types of settings to express that without the fear of judgement and then you’re not seeking validation to have to say okay the textbook says that so I can back it up.

This personal connection that Charity described is embedded in a holistic curriculum that brings personal and intellectual growth and is therefore meaningful and transformative. Thus, the belief in education, and in particular education as the new buffalo, rests in the belief that education has the potential to serve Indigenous communities, but it must be rooted in culture.

Encouraging Family and Community to Take the Course or Program

The belief in education, particularly with the Indigenous courses or the Gidayaamin program as a whole, was expressed by the participants who felt so strongly about their educational experiences that they encouraged family and community to sign up. As Shannon noted, “with recruitment we’re all involved—especially if you realize

that someone could benefit from the kind of experience that you had which might have been similar or different.” Sherry agreed with Shannon and added, “There’s no financial incentive for us, it’s more about getting people to the place that we are and having that same awakening. It’s something that we promote because we believe in it.”

Leigh and Jessica also noted that they have encouraged family members to take the program:

I think about so many Indigenous women who should take this program and I even told my sister-in-law my mother-in-law like I really think you guys should be a part of this because I know how colonized—it taught me what colonization means. (Leigh)

Jessica’s comment also affirms why she has encouraged family to take the program: “I keep getting family to take the program. Bringing people from Sault Ste. Marie ...it’s a really good program and if you wanna learn about yourself as a person you need to take it.” The above comments all demonstrate that the women gained something meaningful from the program and felt that it was important for others who could also benefit. As the women “gathered the sweetgrass” and carried the lessons derived from Indigenous maternal teachings forward, they have also planted seeds within their own homes and communities. As Grandmother Lorene affirmed during the pilot study, “not only your family benefits but your community.” The women have indeed used their lessons to feed the buffalo.

Feeding the Buffalo

As I noted above, if education is truly “the new buffalo”—a contemporary tool of survival for Indigenous peoples—it must align with Indigenous visions of education. The

participants expressed a belief in education but in a decolonized education. Thus, it is important for education to be reclaimed by Indigenous peoples. For Angelica, the work of reclaiming education has already begun and captures her experience in the courses:

Coming to school I didn't recognize that we were all colonized. I didn't understand that and now I'm working to decolonize myself and I see that because it's like we're kind of working to take education in our own hands and to make it our own again. (Angelica)

The vision of taking education in our hands as Indigenous learners and educators aligns with the work of Battiste (2013) on decolonizing education and creating space for “an education of their own making and vision” (p. 188).

The need to take education in their own hands was also expressed by Natalie who noted that she has applied the knowledge she learned in the courses and used it to teach students in her non-Indigenous courses. In response to Natalie, Grandmother Shirley articulated, “So you're feeding the buffalo, It's amazing.” Similar to Natalie, other participants noted applying Indigenous knowledge in other courses. This is discussed further in the advocacy subtheme of Community Involvement and Giving Back to Community in Chapter 6. Thus, the metaphor of education as the new buffalo is strengthened by the women's commitment to share the sustenance with the entire community, much like in the days of the buffalo (Stonechild, 2006).

The work to reclaim education is important because it serves as an expression of the reciprocal relationship of Indigenous education that is embedded within Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. It is indeed a learning exchange. An understanding of education as “the new buffalo” rests within this reciprocal exchange. Metaphorically, we must feed the

buffalo in order for it to nourish and sustain us. Grandmother Shirley captured this when she noted “everything that you’ve been fed through all these courses... it’s ultimately food for you.” She continued by declaring that feeding the buffalo is “really about self-determination” and asked the women “are you going to take and continually take?” Grandmother Shirley reminded the women of the importance of reclaiming culture to feed their spirits and related this to self-determination. She articulated “that medicine wheel [is] a part of you.... Feed the buffalo so that we break away from the continual hand out from the government.” Moreover, Grandmother Shirley talked about the struggles that are passed down intergenerationally by highlighting the integral role of the push back that rests in our resistance to struggle and the will to keep moving forward. She came full circle by articulating “we do it with this research right, feed that buffalo.”

Visions of Success

Again, as I noted in Chapter 1, my praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is inspired by the vision of success that was expressed by the women who participated in my MEd research, along with the students who I have taught over the past several years. I remain committed to aligning my pedagogical approach with Indigenous women’s visions of success. Thus, part of this work was finding out what success meant to the participants and how well Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy fosters their visions of success. I shared an open definition of student success with the participants noting that although academic success is generally defined by academic achievement and associated with high marks, a definition of academic success for Indigenous women might include a balance of academic achievement with the attainment of one’s educational goals and aspirations. For many Indigenous students, educational goals are often inspired by the value of

reciprocity and the intention of giving back to the community (Battiste, 1998; J. Brant, 2011; Monture-Angus, 1995). For Indigenous women specifically, educational goals are often also embedded within a desire to contribute to the betterment of their families and communities (J. Brant, 2011; Pomrenke, 2011). As I noted, I was also looking to the women in this study to articulate their understandings of Indigenous women's academic success. Here I will share their responses to provide an understanding of their visions of academic success:

Academic success.... It's about taking what I can out of it and finding a lot of reiteration of my life and taking the things that I already knew, it's like affirming to me.... I'm able to dig through my family and everything that has happened in my life and discover where those roots are and how it's gotten to be the way it is. So, I really valued everything I did learn from these classes.... I don't think I look at it as necessarily grades. (Shannon)

As Shannon noted, for her, a vision of academic success is more than the grades. To clarify this vision, Shannon shared a story about a training course she took that was culturally based:

I go in the class and I'm surrounded by Anishnaabee people and I'm like oh this is kind of cool because I'm here and it's like Haudenosaunee all over the place and that thought process and those teachings and not that I'm not appreciative for what I learn here but I think for me it was in that moment it was exactly what and where I needed to be and I had the best training. And then my grade came in and I had a friggen 63 and I was so mad that I took that paper and crumpled it up and threw it in the trash and I was pissed off—I took the most from that training

though, I took the absolute most and I participated and I got such a crappy mark, but I get everything that I took from it. And that's how I feel about this course too you know my mark might not have been the greatest and I may not have got papers in but that's not to say that I didn't take anything from it.

Not only did Shannon explain that what she got out of the course content was more important to her than the final grade, but she also drew attention to the importance of the cultural content. For her, she wanted more than Indigenous content, she wanted content that was relevant to her Anishnaabee identity. This is an important piece that needs to be considered in the design of Indigenous curriculum.

The following comment made by Charity showcases the importance of personal development:

My vision of academic success changed a lot from my first program to my second program. My first program was about completing it. Get in and get out and get the grades, do the courses and then get a job.... My purpose in the program was to graduate; not to learn. Whereas my second program, approaching it from a different space, knowing that it was more about the personal growth and taking the time and proving things for myself.

As Charity explained, she went back to school and enrolled in the Indigenous Studies courses after having her children, so she approached her second program with a different mindset than how she approached her first program, which she completed as a young woman without children. She noted that returning to school was more about her learning journey with an emphasis on the learning process as opposed to the final grade. Charity's comment resonated with Sherry's statement "that it no longer became a matter of grades

or what my grade point was going to be. It was more of what I was learning and what I invested in it.” Sherry continued by noting “all the Aboriginal classes that I took, it was more of a personal gratification that I got not from grades but rather from what I was learning” (Sherry). Jessica extends this sentiment in the following:

Academic success wasn’t just about marks but about my learning journey as well. Not just academically, but where I was going to find out who I was, it provided me with kind of like a little piece of the puzzle that I was searching for, and I didn’t want to just know about who I was but I also wanted to know about other people like my peers because we all learned from each other. We all provided that background. Each person would share their background with one another and we all learned from each other and would feed off one another. So that was part of my academic success because we set those building blocks for each other to succeed. (Jessica)

There was a lot of sharing that took place throughout the courses as I attempted to promote safe Homeplaces for dialogue and encourage interaction, reflection, and personal connections with course material. As Jessica noted above, the students fed off one another, which aligns with the communal sharing of the buffalo. The women shared in education as the new buffalo and the sustenance they received took the form of communal growth. Sharon also considered this sharing to be a component of success:

I think that it’s hard to differentiate between high marks and academic success because when you’re interested in doing something you’re going to do well....

When we had our presentations at the end of the course, and you left that open to what we wanted to do, a few women did very emotional pieces and I wasn’t really

in any place to do that but that was sort of a success because they were able to come in front of their academic peers and show their success as a woman through song or personal experience. Leaving that course, I realized the success and importance of sharing and sharing your own experience...it was a success of being able to be comfortable enough to share.

Being comfortable enough to share personal stories may stem from the subjective nature of the courses that invokes emotional learning. Angelica felt that the successes of these courses, particularly with the personal connections, extended into future courses.

She noted:

The Aboriginal courses set you up to be able to succeed in the other courses because the work is a little bit different but they teach you how to be able to speak with your heart but also speak in a professional way.

The following comment by Natalie also noted the importance of personal growth as it helps to shape one's visions beyond the classroom and into the community:

I guess for Aboriginal courses you really get to grow, which is a huge thing for me, whereas the other courses you're just getting through them to do the essays and get good grades—you want good grades for all of your courses but in all the Aboriginal courses you leave a little bit changed. So, which is important because then you're working on yourself and how you're going to contribute eventually when you get done with school so and I feel like a lot of the Aboriginal studies courses have changed me for the better.

Sabrina also connected academic success with a desire to give back to the community. She explained that her vision of academic success involved “apply[ing] the

knowledge that I gained in those courses in this community.... If there's one thing that I'm most proud of with academic success it's being able to transfer that knowledge to real time every day."

It was evident that the participants' visions of academic success were holistic and moved beyond academic to personal growth, and beyond personal growth to communal wealth. The women's contributions attest to their visions of a rippling effect of a holistic understanding of academic success. This is not an individual desire but rather one that involves providing sustenance for a larger community, much like the teachings of the buffalo. Thus, an understanding of the rippling effect of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is starting to unfold. As I move into the next chapters, I ask the reader to consider Indigenous women's educational experiences, within the framework of education as the new buffalo, to be about sustenance on their terms. Simply put, such visions are not merely about economic sufficiency for the individual but about community well-being that aligns with Indigenous women's cultural aspirations. Before moving forward, however, it is important to note that while the women were indeed enthusiastic about Indigenous women-centred educational opportunities, some felt that reclaiming culture in a mainstream university was in itself a paradox. The following sub-theme raises this concern and highlights an opportunity for considering education as sustenance on their terms.

Irony of Reclaiming Culture in a Mainstream University

The final subtheme in this section discusses the irony of reclaiming culture and Indigenous identity, specifically Indigenous womanhood in a university program. I use the word irony as expressed by the participants and include it in the theme Education as

the New Buffalo because it offers important insights into the complexities associated with the belief in education. On one hand, it could seem paradoxical that Indigenous learners are turning to Western institutions of higher education, when one considers that the history of education in Canada has emphasized assimilating Indigenous peoples and stripping them of their language and cultural identities; on the other hand, education positioned as “the new buffalo” must certainly offer opportunities for cultural identity development in order to align with the needs of Indigenous learners. The above tension was indeed shared by the participants; however, it was apparent that the belief in an Indigenous education outweighs the resistance to education that stems from understanding education, within a historical context, as a place for the suffering of Indigenous peoples. It is evident that the students felt this paradox. For example, Natalie stated, “I’m going to go with the general consensus that everyone is saying here is that ‘knowledge is power,’ which is so ironic because when we’re going to school to reclaim your culture it’s pretty ironic itself.” I drew attention to this irony and asked about the value of learning about Indigenous identity in education, particularly in a mainstream university program. There is also some tension with paying tuition to access that content as captured in Leigh’s statement that “people should be coming to us for learning about our Native philosophies we shouldn’t be putting our Native philosophies in an institution.” Leigh captured a fairly common tension, but one that appears to be outweighed by the belief in education as a necessary source of economic prosperity for Indigenous people. Moreover, the content is associated with a university credential, which is a prerequisite to many employment opportunities in Indigenous and non-

Indigenous organizations. Leigh provided further insight to the tensions associated with this reality for some Indigenous learners:

This is a double-edge sword question. It's a really good question. I think there's more than one way to answer it. In one view, wanting to have that belonging in an institution, wanting to have a space here.... It's that colonized thinking that we need that education that diploma to make us worth something because we've been raised that education is the new buffalo. I don't necessarily agree with that statement, but I do. I get it but I don't believe it, but then again, I believe it because I feed into it.

Leigh further expressed her resistance to learning about culture in education in the following comment: "I would much rather be sitting in Six Nations with my grandmothers learning about medicines, learning about my culture, learning about ceremonies, learning why we do ceremonies than sitting in an institution learning about psychology, law, economics...." As Leigh noted, however, she is back and forth on this issue, and her belief in education, one that is culturally relevant, is evident in the following statement:

I vouch for this program so much because it challenges you to step outside of your comfort zone and you have to step outside of your box a little bit.... Those experiences are a challenge and almost feed us in a way, because if you can go this far and accomplish this much.... I've gained this much so far and I can keep going. That's the feeling. If I'm capable of doing this little bit then I'm capable of doing more.

Sabrina also provided insights to the above tension while expressing her belief in education in the following comment:

As an Indigenous student, my experience in these courses influenced me in a positive way because I now understand the importance of Indigenous curriculum being offered to Indigenous students as a way of shaping an identity and being comfortable in a Westernized institution. That was hard for me. It was hard for me to learn about who I was in a university. The content and the courses are so important so when my children grow up and go to university wherever it's nice to know that these kinds of courses are going to be offered. Now my son wants to go to Brock because of my experiences.

The above tensions are opportunities for further reflections and express a dialogue that could take place within courses where Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is enacted. Such a conversation involves input from students who should be empowered to define learning opportunities that align with cultural and community visions.

The Sweetgrass Has Been Gathered

The above themes offer a glimpse into the realities of the Indigenous women participants and their educational plans and pathways. I began by describing Indigenous women's journeys to and within university to provide a sense of the life experiences that are woven into the braids of their sweetgrass. As Laura noted, the women drew from all their experiences and it shaped how they moved forward. The experiences carried forth also offer some understandings of the complexities associated with the belief in education for Indigenous learners. Although these experiences and perceptions may not be representative of all Indigenous women, they do offer valuable insights that certainly

provide understandings for the development of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. This chapter serves as a background that sets the scene for understanding some of the initial lessons that the women have carried in their baskets. As I move on to the next chapter, “Weaving the Baskets and Gathering Medicines,” I continue to describe the pedagogical lessons and medicines (Anderson, 2011) the women have gathered along their educational paths and carry in their sweetgrass baskets, and the seeds they are gathering to plant in their homes and communities for future generations.

CHAPTER 5: WEAVING THE BASKETS AND GATHERING MEDICINES

Plants are also integral to reweaving the connection between land and people. A place becomes a home when it sustains you, when it feeds you in body as well as spirit. To recreate a home, the plants must also return. (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 259)

I share the above words that express the cultural teachings on the interconnectedness between plant medicines, land, and Indigenous women to extend the metaphor of the sweetgrass basket. I ask readers to imagine the women weaving the baskets and gathering medicines in this chapter as an act of reweaving the connections between plant medicines (sweetgrass lessons), land (creation and sense of Homeplace), and people (themselves, their families, and their communities). This chapter includes the following themes: Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, Foundation for Indigenous-Centred Learning and Success, and Transformative Learning. These themes are braided together and infused in the weaving of the sweetgrass baskets. The medicines (lessons learned) that are gathered throughout the courses are gathered by the participants and carried in their sweetgrass baskets as they journey forward.

Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy

To begin the theme, Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, I present an exchange between Sabrina and Grandmother Lorene that took place during the pilot study. It was hard for me to place this piece within one theme because I feel it crossed many of the themes and I will refer back to it. I have placed it here because it is an expression of the power of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and the transformative power this pedagogy has on one's cultural identity. Grandmother Lorene's response to Sabrina is evidence of the Maternal Essence and maternal support that is part of both Indigenous Maternal

Pedagogy and Indigenous Maternal Methodology, and can thus be understood holistically. I will return to Sabrina's words when I discuss holistic well-being. The first three quotations that follow were articulated by Sabrina during the pilot study and the final quotation is Grandmother Lorene's response to her during that sharing circle:

In Search of April Raintree and *Sweetgrass Basket*, those are sad stories and I know they're reality because I face that in my family, like that's my family, you know, so they weren't really shocking to me, they didn't have that shocking effect, it was kind of like well it's out there now.... I would never be able or I would never consider telling my story in that kind of context but because it was out there it kind of made me feel a little bit more safe with my feelings, my own feelings. So, I learned a lot and I really enjoyed it. (Sabrina)

I'm 35-years old and I've never in my lifetime felt as comfortable with myself as I do after finishing this program and I totally 100 percent believe it was this program. I never felt comfortable or confident like I feel in myself now because of everything that I know. (Sabrina)

I can't really verbalize it properly but I'm like comfortable now in my own self and that was the whole reason why I decided to go into this course because I was on a healing journey. And I feel like I accomplished it in this program but I never had a way to verbalize those feelings.... I can't verbalize it properly but I'm like, "It just feels right!" That's how I feel! I can't explain it! (Sabrina)

It's coming home. And right now, listening to you it's just like a prayer to all those grandmothers... that maternal energy.... It's like coming home, coming home to your spirit, you're coming home to Indigenous knowledge that has been

ingrained in all of us, every part of our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual, they have had all this memory just waiting there... and that's what it feels like, coming home. (Grandmother Lorene)

The above words shared by Grandmother Lorene in response to Sabrina are a powerful testament to Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. In all the courses that I teach, I present the theories of Maternal Essence and Homeplace. Both are captured in the above exchange in a way that showcases the transformative power of bringing theory and practice together within an Indigenous pedagogical framework that is also deeply spiritual. At times, it is difficult to capture the spiritual elements of Maternal Essence and Homeplace, or the emotions expressed by the participants and Grandmother Shirley during the sharing circles. For other aspects, such as the ceremony that took place during the sharing circles, it is not appropriate to translate them into text, but it is my hope to convey the value of spiritual and maternal support within Indigenous educational environments. Maternal Essence and Homeplace indeed characterize the space in which Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy exists.

The following comment by Angelica further describes the pedagogical landscape of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy:

I think the Maternal Pedagogy, after taking your mothering class I really have more insight on what it is because we talk about it—it's that nurturing atmosphere and allowing students to feel comfortable to talk and even as women and everything that women go through—that we are all connected and there is so much power to what we are as women and what we mean to our culture. Within a Western culture, women have been devalued for so long and they're not

celebrated and I think it's really important from both an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal approach to really remember women and celebrate them. I'm glad that we were able to do that in the mothering class you learn about the struggles but you also learn about the resilience and power that they had.

With the above-described pedagogical landscape in mind, the theme Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is divided into the following subthemes: Maternal Essence and Homeplace, Overall Course Experiences, Course Material, Meaningful Assignments, the Power of Indigenous Women's Literature, Envisioning a Space for Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, and Education as Healing.

Maternal Essence and Homeplace

Maternal Essence and Homeplace were expressed during the pilot study as well as the sharing circles as the Grandmothers who guided the circles also offered maternal teachings and valuable lessons that brought healing to the circles. I described Maternal Essence and Homeplace in the theoretical framework section of Chapter 2, but will elaborate here to give a sense of the ways these theories are found within course material and applied throughout the three courses. A prevalent theme that is common in Indigenous women's literature is the presence of Maternal Essence. This theme is expressed by Indigenous authors in several ways. For example, Janice Acoose (1995) drew attention to the maternal energy that guides Indigenous women throughout their life journeys. For her, this energy is what brought her back to her homelands. Maternal essence is described as an inspiration for Indigenous women's literature. As Beth Brant noted, the late Mohawk poet E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake) serves as a spiritual grandmother who inspires Indigenous women to write today. Johnson's work is now the

feature of numerous anthologies on poetry and literature and, as Grandmother Lorene noted, she was indeed “a woman before her time.” I define Indigenous women’s literature itself as a maternal act because it is embedded with maternal figures who have had significant or influential effects on the cultural identities of other characters. This is evident in the role of Cheechum as described in *Half-Breed* (Campbell, 1973), the autobiography of Maria Campbell. These stories are shared through Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and contribute to a classroom Homeplace as a site of resistance and a space for renewal and self-recovery. Extending the work of bell hooks (2007), I position Indigenous women’s literature as a site of Homeplace where Indigenous women can “heal [their] wounds and become whole” (p. 277). The lessons of Maternal Essence and Homeplace have been carried by the women who made the maternal connections noted below. Education as a space to make such connections can be understood in Grandmother Lorene’s description of the courses being akin to a contemporary women’s lodge. In this sense, the courses were described as a space, like a traditional lodge, where women would take time for self-care and to learn about life-skills and women’s roles. Later in the circle, Grandmother Lorene drew attention to the spiritual guidance the women continue to receive:

It’s just like all the grandmothers are just kicking up their heels right now because...as a woman you’re reconnecting and it’s so powerful because they’ve been wanting it for a long time because they see so much and all of them have been guiding, the ancestors are saying go here, go here, go here, and they’re hearing your words. It’s just like I can see them just kicking up their heels and saying yes, they got it! They got it!

Grandmother Lorene's words validate Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a space for Indigenous women's healing and wellness. Grandmother Lorene continued by offering empowering lessons about Indigenous women's roles:

Our strength comes from within us and within our mother the earth. We have the ability to heal, we wore many hats, we weren't just a woman, we were a leader, we were a teacher, we were a doctor, we were a healer, and all of us have that inside of us.

After Grandmother Lorene described the importance of women learning to say no and to take time for self-care, Sabrina noted "I wanted to cry like four times already." In response, Grandmother Lorene shared a story about her granddaughter as a lesson on the importance of women needing to learn how to cry and she reminded us that tears are healing. These emotions expressed in the circle are evidence of the nurturing and healing environment that encompasses the maternal legacy present in Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy.

For many Indigenous women, a maternal legacy is an integral part of cultural identity development. Angelica noted a conversation with her grandmother that clarified the nation to which she belonged. Although this was not the nation Angelica had grown up identifying with, she understood what her grandmother was explaining because of the identity issues associated with Indian status that she had learned in the program. Similarly, Shannon connected her search for identity with the course material, noting that after reading *Sweetgrass Basket* (Carvell, 2005), she reflected back into her own life and family history. She described her ongoing search to understand her cultural roots, noting

“I feel like an archeologist sometimes.” Shannon’s grandmother has now passed on, but Shannon described the maternal legacy that she discovered in her quest:

Somewhere in the losing identity and losing language and losing all those things, they still held on to something... my grandmother left me with so much but had no clue.... They have no idea the stuff that they hold and that I guess we take for granted, and for me that self-discovery of uncovering who I am and knowing where I came from and knowing where my roots are planted is so significant to me and it’s very important for me to be able to raise my own children that way and give them those things.

For some women, that connection to a grandmother is not there, and there is a yearning for that maternal guidance. The following poem that I present in the literature courses brings an understanding to this yearning that is experienced by many Indigenous women:

Grandma we all need partially deaf & busy with weaving listens
through a thick blanket of years & sore feet....

Grandma who died long before I was born

Come back

Come back. (Chrystos, 1988, p. 153)

Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy offers a space where all women can find maternal guidance within the course material and the synergy that arises from class discussion.

Within the space of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, women who are yearning for a maternal connection may find maternal energy and connect to whatever degree they are comfortable in doing so. As Grandmother Lorene noted in the pilot study, “Our strength

comes from within us and within our mother the earth.” At times, gentle and nurturing reminders of that internal strength plant seeds of empowerment. The remaining subthemes will offer reflections on the course materials that have served as gentle (and perhaps not so gentle at times) reminders of women’s internal strength and much more.

Overall Course Experiences

One of the questions posed during the sharing circles asked the women to share a bit about their overall experiences in the course(s) or something that stood out to them. I’ve included lengthy responses here that express the participants’ experiences and help to provide an understanding of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy:

I took all three courses, I took the 2P17 [Reclaiming Indigenous Women’s Literary Traditions and Educational Aspirations], which I loved. All of the readings were just really good—and it got me reading again. I loved the literature that was presented in the course. The 3P47 [Indigenous Women’s Literature: Activism and Empowerment] was another one that I really enjoyed. I used the poem from Connie Fife “Resistance.” It’s so powerful and I use it in my papers. Then I took 3P80 [Indigenous Mothering and Motherhood: Historical and Contemporary Realities]. I really liked that course as well because we did a mothering memoir and I kind of went a little corny [very thorough] with mine, but I wanted to get the message out there. We did scrapbooking in 3P47 and 3P80, which I really enjoyed because it allowed us to get our thoughts out there and we had the freedom to present what we wanted to present so that was really interesting and I really liked that. (Jessica)

Grandmother Shirley prompted Jessica by asking, “What was your favourite one or were they all equal weight for you?” In response, Jessica articulated:

I think my favourite one was probably the [Indigenous Women’s Literature] Activism and Empowerment just because the readings were a little bit more difficult. We read Morningstar Mercredi’s (2006) *Morningstar: A Warrior’s Spirit* and it was just a powerful read, but it was hard at times to read. So, I think that one just because of the connection to the title as well, and then the readings and the material that was brought in and then allowing us to present it back [to the class] through different ways, the scrapbooking and other assignments that we did.

Sherry and Sabrina also responded with the following descriptions of their experiences:

I took all three courses. [INDG 2P17 *Reclaiming Indigenous Women’s Literature*], my first course during my first year of university in the Gidayaamin program and when I went into the class that’s kind of the first time I ever really heard the term “Aboriginal Women’s Literature.” ... I never really read any Native literature let alone Native women’s literature so that course itself had opened up my eyes to the fact that there was Native women’s literature. And my favourite book that I always use now, that I always quotation, is the Janice Acoose book [*Iskwewak Kah’Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak*] *Neither Indian Princess nor Easy Squaw* and I like the spin that she took on that because she took the colonizers’ words and twisted it back to get her message across, and just all the information in that book. That course itself introduced me to Aboriginal women’s literature. The Activism and Empowerment course, that’s where I kind of first

started realizing how powerful words can be. I think I've always known how powerful they were against us you know, the negative stereotypes and stuff, but how that again can be reversed and used as a healing and empowerment process. So, Maria Campbell and Beth Brant, those authors, I remember reading them and just being so empowered by them specifically in that course. (Sherry)

In the INDG 3P80, the Aboriginal mothering course, I remember going in there and... I wanted to learn about Aboriginal mothering because that was taken away and then I remember you saying, "this isn't to learn about how to mother but it's to learn about mothering." Going into the course I had a lot of ideas of Aboriginal, Native, Indigenous—whatever term you want to use—mothering but what does that mean am I supposed to fit into this box, and so it kind of helped me reflect on who I am as an Aboriginal mother. (Sherry)

In 2P17 [Reclaiming Indigenous Women's Literature], I learned the importance of telling your story and the importance of being able to listen to other women's stories. With 3P47 [Indigenous Women's Literature: Activism and Empowerment], I remember a specific class when we were talking about the meaning of political and I had initially thought that politics was something so nasty that I never wanted to be a part of but in that class I realized that everything I say is political. For 3P80 [Indigenous Mothering and Motherhood], I learned about honouring myself because I always struggled with the thoughts "I'm not a good enough mom or how can I be a better mom for my kids like the Pinterest moms." I never bake or cook with my kids because I'm a busy single mom, but in that class I learned that I'm good enough. (Sabrina)

Sabrina's description of her experience in INDG 3P47 is part of an ongoing conversation on her understanding of politics. During one class, I took time to facilitate a discussion about politics in response to Sabrina's expressed dislike of anything associated with politics. I explained to her that her involvement in the Idle No More movement was a grassroots form of being political. We also took the time to discuss the sophisticated social and political structures that governed Indigenous nations pre-contact. It was a learning curve, but over time, Sabrina came to accept the term political as meaning something more than the control over Indigenous nations. As the course instructor, I believed that it was important for Sabrina to become comfortable with the term political as it would help to bring a deeper understanding to course material and shape the classroom conversations as they applied to contemporary Indigenous realities, many of which Sabrina was actively involved in throughout the course. Thus, the very act of being involved with Indigenous community activism was an important component that was informed by and informed Sabrina's educational journey. As noted earlier, she described her activism experiences that occurred during the time she was in Gidayaamin as prompting "a new beginning; a whole new world."

In sum, the overall course experiences described above provide evidence of the personal connections the women made with the course material and assignments. Jessica's comment that the course prompted her to read again was echoed by Leigh who stated she began to read entire novels for the first time and actually enjoyed reading. Sherry's comment about recognizing the power of words was also noted by other participants and expressed in assignments. The empowerment Sherry found within Indigenous women's literature was a common sentiment among participants. Finally,

Sabrina's experience of realizing she is "good enough" and the need to honour herself will be elaborated in the personal well-being theme. With the above overall experiences in mind, I will now draw attention to the students' descriptions of the course material.

Course Material

In all of the courses that I teach, I incorporate a variety of material to engage students in meaningful learning exchanges. Primary course material includes the literature (course texts, autobiographical narratives or memoirs, selected journal articles, and poetry) and secondary material includes documentaries, online podcasts, art analyses, and guest speakers. I present student comments that cue connections to particular course readings. Published autobiographical novels assigned in the courses are elaborated in the next subtheme.

As a whole, I very much loved reading the assigned literature. I enjoyed the variety between novels, articles, and poetry. This allowed us to bring out our creative sides and feel comfortable with them. I never felt as though I had to hold back in any way. This helped me in a way that has perhaps changed my path....

This literature has opened my eyes to a whole new level of spiritual learning. This I find to be an important aspect in a student's university career as this will allow the student to be well rounded. (Laura)

Janice Acoose's (1995) book *Iskwewak Kah'Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak Neither Indian Princess nor Easy Squaw* was particularly meaningful to many of the students including Sherry who described it as a favourite. Acoose's book, included as a required reading in INDG 2P17 is quite different than the memoirs the students are assigned in the literature course but it serves as a foundational read that, as evidenced in the title,

addresses the stereotypical landscape that shapes Indigenous women's contemporary realities. This is the first book in the INDG 2P17 that I assign. The first few weeks of the course are spent connecting this book with the four components of Kim Anderson's (2000) theory of identity formation. Sharon, Shannon, and Natalie offered a sense of the students' connection to the book. For example, Sharon described her connection to the book as follows:

Janice Acoose's book, specifically in the first chapter she talks about her birth in a cold sterile setting and basically since birth your external settings are imposed and it's not the traditional way. My final paper for this course was on reclaiming childbirth and childrearing practices so that really stuck with me and then I continued to consider it and consider how formative birth is and when I was on the reserve I became close with a midwife and we had many great conversations.

(Sharon)

Shannon also noted, "I do recall with the Acoose book feeling like I want more, I want more." Her comment expresses a hunger for literature that reflects Indigenous women's realities. Part of the reason for this can be understood in Natalie's comment:

2P17 is where you introduced us to four different books written by Aboriginal women, which was really nice because you always read about Aboriginal stuff by other people so it was really neat to read from a perspective where they're not talking about how damaged we are but rather talking about the accomplishments and how resilient we are so that was really nice and I love Janice Acoose to this day I still use her book... Janice Acoose being the most powerful for me.

(Natalie)

In addition to Janice Acoose's book assigned in my literature courses, I assign several memoirs and autobiographical novels that were described as powerful by the women. These include Morningstar Mercredi's (2006) *A Warrior's Spirit*, Beatrice Culleton's (1983) *In Search of April Raintree*, Maria Campbell's (1973) *Half-Breed*, and Marlene Carvell's (2005) *Sweetgrass Basket*. These books are discussed in the following subtheme to express the importance of Indigenous Women's Literature.

In the mothering course, I assign the following anthologies: "*Until our Hearts Are on the Ground*" *Aboriginal Mothering, Oppression, Resistance and Rebirth* (Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere Lavell, 2006) and *Mothers of the Nations: Indigenous Mothering as Global Resistance, Reclaiming and Recovery* (Lavell-Harvard & Anderson, 2014). Both books include a mix of academic and narrative style essays. I assign additional readings along with memoirs, videos, and guest speakers. The following comments are evidence of the participants' connections with the course material assigned in INDG 3P80, the mothering course:

Two readings that I really liked, were Kim Anderson's reading about her birthing experience and the practices that I didn't know about but what she had went through and learned through her experiences, and also Renée Bédard's chapter, she talks about traditions and ceremonies in her reading so I was actually able to gain that knowledge from that. (Jessica)

Other participants talked about the videos shown in class, including recorded keynote addresses by Morningstar Mercredi and Maria Campbell:

Morningstar Mercredi's keynote from the MMIW conference that was really really moving. Maria Campbell's keynote that was amazing she shared her story

of being sexually abused and being a sex worker and talked about her story and she wasn't a victim she was a survivor she was still, and I liked that because it wasn't that victimhood and that always seeing Aboriginal women as victims, she was able to deconstruct that identity and make us really see her story and where she is today and it's because of everything she went through and that it didn't hinder her in any way it made her stronger. (Angelica)

Angelica continued by noting these lessons of survival are important for all women:

Other women can identify with her but she did it and she made it. She's a survivor and she's strong—a strong woman! And we as Indigenous women need to see that, and all women. I feel like all women can relate to that because all women share oppressions, marginalized women and Aboriginal women more so than anyone else, but I feel like it's really really important. But even for the non-Indigenous students in the class I feel like those videos are so crucial.

The following quotation from Natalie can be connected to the quotation I shared earlier describing Sabrina coming to terms with the word political. Because Indigenous literature and course topics are political in nature, this understanding is important.

The video with Wahneek Hornmiller, it brought into the question of status again because she has children with a non-Native man and she never considered dating a non-Native and seeing the Oka stuff live and how she helped her little sister that whole clip was really eye opening—is this incredibly racist or not because you don't know you want to preserve the blood line. I know it's a controversial issue. Is it racist and militant or is it about preserving bloodline and resisting a government system of assimilation? It's all based on that damn card so if we

could get away from that then these issues wouldn't exist. I don't have the answer. (Natalie)

Not only was the Indigenous women's material meaningful to the students, but as Angelica described, an understanding of privilege was also meaningful to students. I introduce Peggy McIntosh's (1988) article on privilege along with Kate Bornstein's (1998) pyramid of oppression and ask the class to place Indigenous women on the pyramid. As a class, we also reflect on the different privileges of Indigenous women as well. In this way, everyone in the class recognizes their own privilege and I believe this can be a very humbling exercise that fosters a safe and equitable space for cross-cultural dialogue. During this exercise, I note my own privilege as the instructor of the course. I also draw attention to privilege when we cover the work of the late Patricia Monture-Angus. As an example, I draw on the following excerpt:

I have often been amazed that I landed at law school in Kingston, Ontario, only eight blocks away from the federal Prison for Women. I have always felt that I should have properly landed on the other side of that high limestone wall. It was both anger and amazement that took me on my journey to university. (Monture-Angus, 1995, p. 48)

I also share Monture-Angus's description of her infant son being apprehended for 9 days by children's services. She noted that they mocked her credentials as a lawyer and accused her of child abuse. As she described, her Indigenous identity and the stereotypical lens through which the hospital viewed her had a devastating effect on her family well-being. These examples showcase the fine line that connects Indigenous women, and also prompt students to consider the realities associated with the different

forms of privilege. Angelica articulated the personal value she ascribed to the article as she considered her own privilege:

The one article you assigned to us Peggy McIntosh, it was like incredible. I loved that article.... I introduced it last year in my WISE 1F90—I said we should read about White Privilege because I think it's very important that we talk about this because you know you study Western literature but what about other literature. You know, people don't recognize the privilege of being able to have that literature and not have it questioned. As Aboriginal people, we have to fight so hard for our voices to be heard and to even publish, you know find someone who would publish our work. It's been a very hard process for our people right, but we're able to do it and I think it's really important that you know, like anyone who looks White or anyone who has privilege, you know they don't even think twice about the privileges they have in the world over another group. And it's really crucial because we don't even realize it. It's just unseen. So, I think that's really important.... I have White privilege too.

Angelica makes it evident that she has grasped a thorough understanding of privilege by applying it to herself as well as the lack of publishing opportunities discussed in the literature course. She has carried these lessons forward and applied them in other courses she has taken in the women and gender studies program.

The above examples illustrate the ways the women connected with the course material. As the women noted, they found reflections of themselves, their families, and communities in the literature and this was described as very powerful for them. As the course material described hardships and community traumas that provided a general

sense of knowing and familiarity for the students, the success stories and the showcase of resilience was also empowering for the women and provided lessons that the women carried forward into other courses and assignments as well as family and community relations. As the following subtheme will describe, the women especially connected with Indigenous women's literature.

The Power of Indigenous Women's Literature

Pauline Johnson's physical body died in 1913, but her spirit still communicates to us who are Native women writers. She walked the writing path clearing the brush for us to follow. And the road gets wider and clearer each time a Native woman picks up her pen and puts her mark on paper. (B. Brant, 1994, pp. 7–8)

The above words that I share with my students in the literature course help them to connect with the Maternal Essence of Indigenous women's literature. B. Brant's words also express the work that has already been done to help clear a literary path for Indigenous writers and the medicines in the literature that help bring clarity to Indigenous women's realities. I extend this sentiment to the work of the participants who are indeed clearing a path and gathering medicines as they journey with their sweetgrass baskets in hand.

This subtheme expresses the power and importance of Indigenous women's literature. The women described literature written by and for Indigenous women as a source of resilience. For some, this literature helped them to feel safe with their own feelings and experiences and prompted them to share their own stories. As Sabrina explained, "In 2P17 I learned the importance of telling your story and the importance of being able to listen to other women's stories." Indigenous women's literature was also

described as a counternarrative to some of the stereotypical perceptions presented in mainstream literature, media, and film. This subtheme is expressed in the following categories: resilience, safe with feelings, and Indigenous women's literature as a counternarrative.

Resilience. Beatrice Culleton, the author of *In Search of April Raintree* (1983/2008), expressed the need to “live powerfully or succumb to victimhood” (p. 237). The book takes readers through a powerful story of overcoming a life of victimization to personal triumph as April comes to terms with her Indigenous identity. I came across the book in the summer of 2011 and I read it in two days. I couldn't put the book down and immediately knew it was a fit for the literature course. It is an emotional read that “transforms the [wo]man who reads it towards the condition of the [wo]man who wrote” (Forster, 1951, p. 93). I believe the book is a must read for all Canadians as it takes readers down some of the dark roads of Canada's past and provides a sociocultural understanding of contemporary Indigenous realities. In this way, the book promotes empathy and compassion. Indigenous and non-Indigenous students who have taken my course have expressed to me that they have passed the book on to others to read as well. Jessica and Sherry shared their perceptions of the book in the following comments:

In Search of April Raintree was one of the readings that I really enjoyed but also learned a lot from because it, like you said before, you're not holding anything back in that book it's like out there. It's kind of like... it's hard to face reality sometimes but then you realize what Aboriginal women went through back throughout the years. So that was my kind of experience. Just learning about who we were and how we overcame things. (Jessica)

In Search of April Raintree, the very first book that we read in that course I had read previously, my sister had read it and she said you have to read this, and I remember reading it and being locked in my room, I had to...I remember I was crying and sobbing and being angry but I had to go through the emotions because for the most part I relate to it and stuff that had happened to me in the past.

(Sherry)

The personal connections Jessica and Sherry described were shared by other women in the circle as well. The women noted the importance of having these stories to help them understand some of their own hardships but also how to overcome those hardships.

Sherry continued by describing the resilience she found within Morningstar Mercredi's (2006) book, *Morningstar: A Warrior's Spirit*:

In that book, there's a lot of truth. There's a lot of things that happen and I don't even know how she found the courage to write it herself. For me one of the hardest things is putting your feelings on paper and giving it to somebody else because then it no longer belongs to you, and other people have that knowledge and I'm used to just keeping that in. But again, like Natalie mentioned, resilience, like reading, getting through the book, getting through the hard parts, and seeing how she went through all of that and still was able to say yes this happened to me but it doesn't define me and who I am. Reading that book for me I was like in awe of her and her strength. (Sherry)

Natalie also noted finding resilience within *Morningstar: A Warrior's Spirit* as it helped her overcome a personal struggle when she considered all the author had survived.

Safe with feelings. As Sabrina noted, finding connections within the literature helped her to become safe with her feelings and come to terms with her own experiences as she found connection with other Indigenous women. She explained, “In relation to my understanding of Aboriginal women’s identities and experiences, it’s really like a collective experience...it’s kind of comforting to be able to identify your experiences that you go through in life and that you’re not alone.” This is further explained in the following comment:

In Search of April Raintree and the *Sweetgrass Basket*, those are sad stories and I know they’re reality because I face that in my family, like that’s my family, you know so they weren’t really like shocking to me, they didn’t have that shocking effect, it was kind of like well it’s out there now like and other aspects like where I would never be able or I would never consider telling my story in that kind of context but because it was out there it kind of made me feel a little bit more safe with my feelings, my own feelings. So, I learned a lot and I really enjoyed it.

(Sabrina)

The above comments showcase the personal connections that Indigenous women find within Indigenous literature. As noted earlier, during the pilot study, Grandmother Lorene connected Sabrina’s feeling of being safe with her own feelings as “coming home to spirit.” This sentiment also connects with the sense of Homeplace that provides a safe place for renewal, self-recovery, and resistance “where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied to us on the outside in the public world” (hooks, 2007, p. 267). As evidenced in Sabrina’s comment, the personal connection was indeed healing and the expression of becoming safe with her own feelings surely prompted a sense of wholeness.

Because the course is open to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, I explain that the literature can serve as both a window and a mirror. For Indigenous readers who find the personal connections described above, the literature served as a mirror that reflected their realities. Within that mirror, the women have seen resilience and personal triumphs and this has been described as healing and empowering. For non-Indigenous readers, the window allowed a clear view that seemed to promote cross-cultural understanding, empathy, and compassion. For some students, the mirror and the window have also prompted a desire for social change. This is evident in the Community Involvement and Giving Back to Community theme in Chapter 6.

Indigenous women's literature as a counternarrative. As Natalie pointed out, the courses offered a counternarrative to the literature that's been historically "written by Europeans about Native women It was very empowering to read the texts that we did because we got to really see a different perspective and Aboriginal women were able to tell their stories and share their experiences." Natalie explained this further, "it was really neat to read from a perspective where they're not talking about how damaged we are but rather talking about the accomplishments and how resilient we are, so that was really nice." The meaningful and personal connections the students found in the readings are also reflected in their assignments.

Meaningful Assignments

In all of my courses I assign tasks that I hope are meaningful to all students and foster a connection with course material that will enhance their learning and allow them to incorporate their voice throughout their work. I share the following words written by

Monture-Angus (1995) with my students so they understand the importance of decolonizing their academic work:

Once I wrote a piece on First Nations women and the violence many of us have experienced. When it came back from the editor, he had removed all of the pieces of “my” story and all the “Is.” He had created an academic piece for me and I think he felt very good because in his mind he had somehow elevated the status of my work. For me, I felt violated; the “me” had been stripped from my work.... In my culture, not speaking from the “me” is a violation. The only true knowledge that I can have is that which is learned from what I have experienced.” (p. 45)

Students are encouraged to include the “me” or personal voice in their assignments. I do not include exams but rather assignments that allow students to engage with the material in meaningful ways. Thus, my assignments are somewhat flexible and open but at the same time align with the learning outcomes and must meet specific criteria. Examples of these assignments include reflective journaling, a scrapbook, and a memoir, as described below. I also assign course papers but allow students to “decolonize their essays” if they are more comfortable in doing so. An example of decolonizing essay writing is to allow the students to structure their paper following a circular or medicine wheel format (Graveline, 1998). Thus, they may open (introduction) and close (conclusion) the circle by considering how their ideas (quadrants) are connected to the whole paper. I encourage students to decolonize their essays by presenting them in four sections if they chose to follow a medicine wheel framework. For example, if they want to connect their papers with Kim Anderson’s (2000) theory, the four sections could align with the components resist, reclaim, construct, and act. This is an alternative to the

standard five paragraph essay and prompts students to begin engaging with Indigenous writing styles in a simple way. Moreover, students are encouraged to position themselves in their writing (Acoose, 1995), write from a personal standpoint, incorporate traditional knowledge, and draw on storytelling formats (B. Brant, 1994; Monture-Angus, 1995). I also share examples of authors who include spirituality in their writing and allow students to do so as well (B. Brant, 1994; Maracle, 2002). The following comments provide a sense of how some students experienced this flexibility:

The scrapbooking, the motherhood memoir, like I said you allowed us the freedom to put what we needed into those and to show you that we understood the readings and the content of the course, and then allowed us to put our own experiences into it as well, especially with the motherhood course. I really liked that. (Jessica)

Sharon noted, “I enjoyed how you encouraged us to decolonize our essays because you’re so used to just filling in the slots for an essay but I found that I had more freedom and... I was able to write more fluidly.” This essay style was encouraged as an alternative that might help students get comfortable with a decolonized writing style. Although Sharon noted enjoying the flexibility, she also stated that at times decolonizing essays through a structure such as the medicine wheel was difficult “because they are so interconnected; resist and reclaim...” (Sharon). Learning to work through medicine wheel frameworks as a form of decolonizing essay writing is an important lesson for students because it allows them to understand the interconnections among course themes and learn how to make decisions that will help them structure their writing. I believe these skills can be carried forward and used later for such things as grant proposal

writing, for example. The ability to present a grant proposal within a decolonized framework could be an essential skill set for work within the area of reconciliation.

Journals. I assign a journaling format that is flexible but also structured in a sense that the students are requested to engage with the weekly course readings by making personal and societal connections. Students are also asked to select several quotations from the weekly articles and explain their selections. Initially, I encouraged a “dialogical reflection and journaling” (Hughes, Kooy, & Kanevsky, 1997) format that prompted reflection and meaningful connections to assigned weekly readings through a double-entry journal where students divide their journals by a margin to include reflection responses on the right side and meaningful quotations on the left. According to Hughes, Kooy, and Kanevsky (1997), “to learn, to make knowledge their own, students must reflect on, interact with, and react to the materials presented to them.... The student must engage the material as if in a dialogue with the author” (p. 187). I received mixed feedback about the dialogical reflection and journaling assignment. Some students found it really useful and others appeared to be intimidated by the double-entry journal format. Even though I have always informed students that journaling is personal and they should use whatever format they find most comfortable as long as it allows them to include quotations and meaningful reflections, I have now explicitly simplified the format by giving students the following instructions of what the journals must include:

You are expected to write a minimum of one page that includes the following: a paragraph summary of the reading, a paragraph that makes a personal or societal connection, a few quotes from the reading that you found meaningful or

interesting and at least one discussion question for the class. (INDG 3P47 Course Syllabus)

Keeping in mind that the assigned readings for these courses are emotionally charged, the following participant comments demonstrate some of the students' perceptions about the journaling assignment:

So, the whole reflection and constant journaling and ongoing reflection were useful tools, even though I fought tooth and nail. I knew the value of it but I think I was afraid of it so I just kind of fought it but did it. (Charity)

Shannon agreed with Charity and stated, "I can relate to that" and Charity further explained that journaling involved "that whole process of being honest with yourself and actually accepting...journaling, one of those necessary evils that you fight within yourself." The above comments must be understood in terms of the course material that prompted cultural identity development and was emotional and personal for many of the students. Thus, many of the students submitted journals that were very personal. This is expressed in the following comment:

I kept all of the journals that I did for your class and I just recently reread them like a month ago like I found them because I just moved and I read the comments out loud and I read my words out loud and I'm like "I wrote this?" I literally was like wow I'm shocked at how deep I got and I didn't even realize it I was like I did not write this and I can't even believe I wrote all of that I was really it was very personal and I'm not usually—well I mean you can tell I'm not really a closed book I'm pretty open but I felt like it was safe it was a safe place and you

told us that to “I’m not sharing these journals with anyone” so that was good.

(Angelica)

For others, the journaling assignment prepared them for class discussion and kept them on track with course readings:

I actually really enjoyed the journaling because I remember we were able to reference it back to the readings and that was good for me, well first to ensure I did the readings. I was able to kind of draw from other from authors’ experiences and also relate back to myself and share the similarities and talk about identity formation. I can relate to these women on some levels not on all, but that was really important. (Angelica)

The journaling component of my courses is integral to the students’ growth and connection to the course material. As Charity expressed, there is value in journaling. I believe the personal challenge is one that fosters intellectual growth for all learners. As Hughes, Kooy, and Kanevsky articulate, “the layers of dialogue enhance the personal meaning of the content, and true, powerful learning occurs” (p. 190). The dialogue that begins in the journaling assignment is extended to the scrapbook project where students can revisit their selected quotations and reflections. In this way, the journals begin a foundation for “layers of dialogue.”

Scrapbook. I also assign a scrapbook project that I have found is very meaningful for the students. The purpose of the assignment is for students to creatively present some of the themes related to the course in an 8- to 10-page scrapbook. For example, they can select Maternal Essence or Homeplace as an overarching theme or they can connect with topics covered throughout the course such as Residential Schools or the Sixties Scoop.

Students are expected to showcase their familiarity with the course material and make social, cultural, and political connections. An important component of the scrapbook is that it must include quotations from course material and a written reflection about the quotations. The scrapbook assignment allows students to tap into their own creativity as they connect with the course material and class discussions in meaningful ways.

Scrapbooks can include images (drawings, clippings from newspapers or magazines, images found online), poetry, diary entries, letters (e.g., an imagined letter written to an author or by a student in a residential school), a birth certificate or Half-Breed certificate, maps, or any other meaningful information. I provide this list to the students for inspiration with a clear indication that these ideas are suggestions not requirements.

Although some students are initially intimidated by the creativity of putting together a scrapbook, the general consensus is that students are happy with the final products and appreciate the opportunity to engage with the course material in different ways. The quality of scrapbooks speaks volumes in terms of the value of this assignment as the final products showcase deep engagement with the course themes and connections among the course material. The following comments present the women's views about this assignment:

All the readings and discussions were very meaningful and helped me understand a lot about my heritage; however, the one assignment that I reflect on often was the scrapbook project in ABST 3P47. We were able to explore absolutely anything our creative minds took us as long as it was in the parameters that were set for us. I had so much fun connecting things such as Homeplace, storytelling,

and politics to my own experiences. This way we learn more and at a deeper level. (Laura)

I really liked the scrapbook assignment. I show that scrapbook and take it with me everywhere and it's really personal so that one was really meaningful to me because it was my whole life story in print and there are some things in that book that I was never able to tell anybody, but it was easier once I got it out; it was like I didn't carry it anymore. It's good even now to look back at it and be like "look at my journey of life, I've been through a lot." So, I'm more forgiving with myself.... It was also an opportunity for me to be honest with myself because I never talk about... but there in saying it and understanding why that happened in my life and the choices I've made and realizing that's not the circle I want to be in and breaking free from that. That's great. I've never talked to anybody about that ever, not even my parents, not even my husband. So, it was good for me.

(Sabrina)

Beyond the journaling, some students were also more personal with the scrapbook assignment than others. Shannon who completed the course before I started assigning the scrapbook noted, "I liked that assignment even though I wasn't even in that class because Sabrina shared hers with me. What an empowering exercise." Shannon continued, "It's like opening Pandora's box that's how I would take something like that. It would be chained to me and have locks around it." Sabrina replied, "I have it sitting right in my office. I carry it and if it's not with me it is here in my office." It was evident that the scrapbooks became treasures that the women will continue to carry in their sweetgrass

baskets and look back on. In this way, their scrapbooks become “fuel for the fire.” This is evident in Sherry’s comment below:

I actually just picked that up two weeks ago going through my stuff and reflecting on it and I love that you had us do that. I think that was one of the best things in that course.... Having that scrapbook, I went back and like just opened it and I was like oh yea Homeplace and all those things and this author and that author and I loved them and looked at my favourite quotations and just stuff that empowered me. It’s fuel for the fire right and when it’s getting a little bit low you look back on it and you kind of remember why you’re doing this or where you were at that point and the ambition to get back there.

The scrapbook assignment, much like the journaling assignment, fosters “the layers of dialogue [that] enhance the personal meaning of the content, [whereby] true, powerful learning occurs” (p. 190). As students work with their hands cutting and gluing images, quotations, and reflections and writing fictional letters, they become connected to the authors or characters who have overcome numerous hardships and provided lessons of hope and expressed a will to survive. Through their imagined dialogues, students become connected to the stories, and a sense of empathy and compassion promotes new layers of cross-cultural understandings for some and cultural identity development for others.

Envisioning a Space for Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy

“Thank you for creating a space through the work that you’re doing.” (Sharon)

In Chapter 1, I noted that my current research has involved synthesizing the work of maternal pedagogy with research on Indigenous ideologies of motherhood within

educational contexts to present a theory of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. As this pedagogical approach seeks to “nourish the learning spirit” (Battiste, 2013) of Indigenous women, my journey toward the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is largely informed by the students. It is a student-centred teaching and learning approach and it is therefore important that this approach works for students and is shaped by the students and that the intended outcomes meet students’ educational desires. Thus, envisioning a space for Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy involves honouring the expressed educational vision put forth by Indigenous women. As I noted in Chapter 1, my journey initially began by responding to an expressed vision of Aboriginal women’s access and success in university gathered through sharing circles in my master’s research (J. Brant, 2011). It has been seven years since I completed that initial research and this current work in many ways seeks to see how my response to that expressed vision as a course developer and instructor has been received by new groups of Indigenous women students. One of my research questions sought to find ways my pedagogical approach could be improved. I present the students’ suggestions below along with my own reflections.

One suggestion was to balance “damage” with “desire.” This was articulated by Sharon who suggested I consider looking at Eve Tuck’s (2009) work titled *Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities*:

I think bringing in this theory would balance out the damage and the desire because reflecting back on my paper for your course it was too damage central but this right here [the sharing circle] shows the desire but it’s not the forefront because there is so much focus on the damage. Not to diminish the damage.

(Sharon)

This is an important comment as the courses cover a lot of emotionally charged material. This, however, is the reality of a messy and dark colonial history. On one hand, it is a fine balance to ensure I am presenting the material in a way that does not re-victimize students. On the other hand, I am reminded of the words Morningstar Mercredi expressed during her keynote at the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Conference (2008): "The issues we talk about make some people uncomfortable, well I'll tell you what get uncomfortable!" I understand her words as an acknowledgment that transformation takes place in a space of becoming uncomfortable. Sharon's suggestion on the need to balance "damage" and "desire" is important as I expand my pedagogical approach to all learners. As Lisa Monchalin (2016) wrote in her "Note to Instructors":

For non-Indigenous peoples, learning about injustices can produce feelings of guilt, anger, and shame. Some people will resist learning about the violent, brutal, and heinous policies and practices of the cultural annihilation, European domination, subjugation, and exploitation of Indigenous peoples. This story challenges the Canadian identity, the country's view of itself "as a nation of benevolent peacemakers." Learning about these aforementioned realities not only brings students' conceptual understandings into dispute but also challenges students at an emotional level. (p. xxv)

The challenges described above are not to be confused with the safe and comfortable learning space I have been describing. Such a comfortable learning environment is necessary to walk students through uncomfortable material. Indeed, as Monchalin (2016) expressed, there is a need for students to move out of their comfort zones as "stepping outside of one's comfort zone can serve as a catalyst for engaging in

constructive critical dialogue” (p. xxv). The need to engage in uncomfortable dialogue within safe Homeplaces is also noted by Monchalin who highlights the importance of truth-telling through storytelling and ceremony, and as she noted this can be done within classroom spaces by bringing in Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers and conducting ceremony such as smudging. I also conduct smudging ceremonies in my classes and have brought in Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers to help facilitate a safe homeplace for emotionally charged dialogue. Although there are limited resources to bring in Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers, these individuals are valuable to a safe homeplace environment and integral to Indigenous curriculum. These steps to create a space for Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy are part of a larger movement of Indigenizing the academy by centring Indigenous worldviews (Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009; L. T. Smith 1999).

Moving forward, I will draw on the work of scholars who work to balance “damage” with “desire” by showcasing resilience. I will also continue to push for resources that make it easier to bring Indigenous knowledges and ceremonies into my courses. In contrast to Sharon’s comment above, Natalie explained that the authors were “not talking about how damaged we are but rather talking about the accomplishments and how resilient we are so that was really nice.”

Creating an intellectual space for Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is, of course, constrained by the Eurocentric structure of course delivery and the students have expressed their own resistance to this structure. For example, the following suggestion by Sherry was something several students have noted throughout the courses in the past: “I resisted the structure—so for example with journaling the structure of them, the format...

if I would change anything I would just let people write and don't restrict their creativity by university guidelines." Although my journaling assignment is very flexible and I encourage students "to just write," I also request that students identify specific quotations from the readings and offer a short reflection on those quotations, as noted earlier. Throughout the circles, several students noted a resistance to journaling and personal reflection, but the general consensus was that the process was meaningful and prompted personal growth. I have strived to create a balance as the students and I work within two worlds that remain dominated by the Western values of the institution. As I continue to carve out space for Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, I will keep the above in mind.

The following comment by Leigh draws attention to a common desire for bringing more culture into the university: "I think it's important to definitely incorporate our cultural teachings throughout the classes." Sherry and Leigh's suggestions shed light on some of the tensions for Indigenous students in mainstream education. Although the courses are Indigenous studies courses, they still fall under the undergraduate degree requirements and university guidelines. The comments to "not restrict their creativity by university guidelines" and "incorporate our cultural teachings" can be challenging for instructors and require change at a higher level. Change may begin in individual classrooms but, as noted above, instructors *are* limited in many ways by the restrictions of the university. This has been an ongoing battle as I continue to strive to teach in a way that speaks to the hearts and minds of all learners.

There were no other suggestions for improvement in the initial three sharing circles but because this question is integral to developing a praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and also directly aligns with one of the research questions, I felt that it was

important to try to get more responses in the feedback circle. To gather these responses, I used the metaphor of the sweetgrass basket and asked the women to consider this basket to be akin to the toolkit that is commonly used as a metaphor. I asked the women “what else they would need to carry in their sweetgrass baskets to assist them on their educational journey?” The women came up with two responses and I will elaborate on these in the sweetgrass basket theme but name them here for clarity. These two other suggestions for improvement were to incorporate teachings on self-care and to include lessons on effective ways to express emotion. Both suggestions offer pedagogical insights that I look forward to including in my own sweetgrass basket as I continue to create a space for Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. Although self-care and lessons on effective ways to express emotion were strong suggestions offered in the feedback circle, healing indeed took place throughout the courses as outlined in the following subtheme.

Education as Healing

This subtheme Education as Healing presents the women’s descriptions of the healing that took place within the space of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy.

I’m noticing that being a student is very nurturing to me. It’s allowing me to give myself something and it’s different than working. I was at Brock the other day for something and I was telling one of the ladies I want to go back to school for another course because I need that balance. When I’m going to school I’m actually taking care of myself. I don’t know if that makes sense, but I got really sick last Fall and the doctor said you gotta knock it off, you gotta take care of yourself and I said I am taking care of myself and I went back the following week and I was worse and he said I told you to take care of yourself and if you can’t

take care of yourself I'm going to put you in the hospital. And I was at home and I thought I have no idea how to take care of myself. I can take care of tons of people, family, community, everyone but not myself, and learning is one of those things for me, taking care of me that helps me develop who I am. (Sabrina)

Sabrina's quotation provides evidence of the connection between cultural identity development and the nurturing of self, which relates to personal well-being described in Chapter 6. As I have noted, the courses are delivered through Kim Anderson's (2000) theory of identity formation and include ongoing conversations about balance by applying medicine wheel and Indigenous maternal teachings. Moreover, in the mothering course, I share lessons about the importance of taking care of oneself in order to care for others. Sabrina articulated her personal application of those teachings as well as the understanding of it as an ongoing process. In this sense, she continued to act "weaving the basket and gathering medicines." Her community work, which will be described in Chapter 6 as an expression of "planting seeds" focuses on the ways she shares her lessons with other women within the Indigenous community to contribute to healing and wellness.

The following three comments provide further insight into Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a space for healing as expressed by the women's experiences:

It's so important that we have your courses and the courses that you teach because it's medicine in a way you know what I mean like it helps us and it really does kind of like add that human component it adds what our mainstream classes are sometimes lacking like that safe place. (Angelica)

I was very honoured to be able to have that kind of healing, and through the classroom, and that's why I'm appreciative of it because I don't think that opportunity is given through education enough I don't think people are given that opportunity to grow as individuals or pay contribution to their journeys. (Leigh)

I did a lot of healing in these courses because you made me, like not made me but you made me get out of my comfort zone and acknowledge some things especially in the mothering course like dealing with some of these things.... My main goal [as a mother] was never to hurt my kids the way I had been hurt... but that healing helps with my relationship with my daughter today. (Sherry)

The above comments attest to the healing potential of teaching and learning environments and the subsequent effects that healing can have as it is passed down to one's children, family, and community. As the following theme reveals, the healing potential of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is woven into the foundation of Indigenous-centred learning and success.

Foundation for Indigenous-Centred Learning and Success

This theme outlines the Foundation for Indigenous-Centred Learning and Success within the following subthemes: Classroom Learning Community, the Classroom as a Sharing Circle, the Importance of a Safe Space, and Nourishing the Learning Spirit.

Classroom Learning Community

In the first theme of this chapter, I focused on course material and delivery; here I include comments that draw attention to the classroom learning environment. It is evident that the environment not only fostered a safe place for learning but also a tight-knit

support system. This is a unique experience for Indigenous women in education who tend to be isolated in mainstream programs.

The Gidayaamin program in general, and the courses I taught specifically, offered an alternative learning environment. As Jessica noted, “the classroom settings are different than mainstream courses—it’s a different dynamic.” Evidence of the participants’ appreciation for this alternative learning environment is captured in the following quotation from Natalie: “I loved having the spaces of Aboriginal women in class.” Moreover, Jessica highlighted the community learning environment, akin to a family, that characterized her experience in the Gidayaamin program:

I’m “first generation” in the program, an honorary member, you start off with that little family and then the next group comes in and I remember doing talks with the next group, you also become family members with those people and then you go in and talk to them and it trickles down right so we all become one big family. (Jessica)

The following comments also draw attention to the shared learning that occurred within the classroom community and even beyond the physical spaces of the classrooms:

We all learned from each other. We all provided that background. Each person would share their background with one another and we all learned from each other and would feed off one another. So that was part of my academic success because we set those building blocks for each other to succeed. (Jessica)

We can all learn from each other. We can all be better human beings if we just listen to one another. That’s where change happens. I think that’s what really just helped me to have that confidence, that holistic education. (Angelica)

The type of learning exchange described by Jessica and Angelica is foundational to Indigenous-centred learning and characterizes the reciprocal learning environment of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy that honours student and community knowledge. The responses make it evident that everyone learned from one another within this safe space of sharing stories and that from those stories it became more about connecting to the readings but also connecting to one another. As Shannon noted, the women continued to make these connections outside the classroom environment as well “because we carpooled back and forth together we would always have these deep conversations coming home from class we’d debrief about what transpired.” Shannon also talked about this ongoing learning exchange as a healing experience and explained that it was the entire group in the Gidayaamin program—the instructors, her classmates (who had become a tight-knit learning community), and also the content—that had helped her find the strength to get through a really difficult time. The healing that took place within the space of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is elaborated further in the following subtheme as the participants described the classroom as a sharing circle.

Classroom as a Sharing Circle

The ability to be able to share openly and willingly in the classroom was self-driven by the students and attests to the establishment of the classroom community. Some of the students described the classroom environment as a sharing circle:

The classroom really helped me to feel a sense of pride in finding out who I was as a person. And I was able to have the support of the teachers and the other students because like I said we became like a family and we became really, you know tears were shed. I still feel it in my heart, like I still feel very warmed from

everyone. We all grew from each other because we would share stories with each other like for instance [classmate] and [classmate], their stories were so impactful on my life and they just made me really feel like I wasn't so different and we could all relate to each other and all grow from each other and that's something that is so beautiful. (Angelica)

Jessica also noted, "With classes like these when you're in the sharing circle you're able to share your ideas and learn from each other and talk." Angelica's comment that I presented earlier in the Education as Healing subtheme reaffirms the understanding of the classroom as a sharing circle. "It's medicine in a way you know what I mean like it helps us and it really does kind of like add that human component it adds what our mainstream classes are sometimes lacking like that safe place." The medicine that Angelica mentions can be understood as the substance (in this case, the course delivery) that nurtures one's learning spirit. In a sharing circle, medicine would usually be offered through a traditional smudging of sage, as an example, or a tobacco offering for prayer.

The following comment draws attention to the importance of trust as a key attribute to community and shared learning as well as a safe nurturing environment:

It makes me feel comfortable to be able to share openly and willing which I think is why I'm so vulnerable in front of people because I feel safe I trust the circle because I trust the classroom that I'm in and I'm able to speak freely and share my true opinions. (Leigh)

Leigh's comment also resonates with a profound statement that Grandmother Shirley offered during the feedback circle: "Within a safe space, vulnerability is the foundation for growth." I return to this statement in Chapter 6 as vulnerability was discussed further

during the feedback circle but note it here to affirm the importance of a safe space, particularly for cultural growth and emotional well-being.

The Importance of a Safe Space

“It’s a safe place. You create a safe place for that ability to share.” (Leigh)

Several of the participants explained that the creation of a safe space prompted their ability to share and be vulnerable in front of other peers. This is evident in the following quotation:

When we had our presentations at the end of the course, and you left that open to what we wanted to do, a few women did very emotional pieces and...they were able to come in front of their academic peers and show their success as a woman through song or personal experience. So, leaving that course I realized the success and importance of sharing and sharing your own experience... [and] being able to be comfortable enough to share. (Sharon)

This sentiment is also evident in Leigh’s comment: “I think your class was the first class where I actually felt comfortable to speak vulnerably and honestly.”

Others noted that the safe and welcoming environment was necessary for their academic success:

I wouldn’t have been able to make it through university if I didn’t do that first year because I guess that was kind of like my safe haven I was able to kind of be myself and learn something new and take that information and cherish it within me. (Angelica)

Angelica took this one step further by drawing attention to how critical a safe space is for Indigenous learners who may feel like they don’t have a space at the university:

[The Gidayaamin program] really does allow us to have a safe place and a sense of belonging in the midst of a stressful environment—school is not by any means fun. This whole semester I’ve been like ripping my hair out pretty much and without the smudging, without the medicines I would literally go mad so I have to have that moment of clarity and if I didn’t have the Gidayaamin program I would have never, like I probably wouldn’t even be in school because I contemplate dropping out all the time....There is not enough culturally relevant supports, not enough services here that we need. We have some kind of room besides Aboriginal student services, which is the size of a shoebox, like there’s nowhere to go to gather together. I feel like the institution needs to do more to respect the land that we’re on, because they’re doing something, but they’re not doing enough. So, I think that’s why with these courses, the instructors are doing something right. I know you all fight so much for all of us students, which we’re so thankful for. If it wasn’t for this program, I wouldn’t be here.

Angelica’s comment above sheds light on the overall holistic support and transition supports that were offered as part of the Gidayaamin program. The following comments make it evident that an established support system was necessary for some of the women’s success and retention. I’ve included this in The Importance of a Safe Space subtheme because such a support system must take place within a safe and nurturing environment:

It was a big change from being in the Gidayaamin program and having those supports but it was also amazing because [the program] got me familiar with the way of university and the work that was going to happen so that way even though

nobody was physically there with me going through the other (program) I still felt accepted, where I think if I had just gone in cold I probably would not have made it. (Sherry)

In response, Angelica noted, “I agree with Sherry, I wouldn’t have been able to make it through university if I didn’t do that first year.” Furthermore, Angelica articulated:

The Aboriginal courses set you up to be able to succeed in the other courses because the work is a little bit different but they teach you how to be able to speak with your heart but also speak in a professional way.

The above comments showcase the transition support of a safe space. It was evident that the nurturing environment nourished their learning spirit offering an intellectual safe space that the women were able to carry with them into subsequent courses.

Nourishing the Learning Spirit

I’m noticing that being a student is very nurturing to me. It’s allowing me to give myself something and it’s different than working, I was at Brock the other day for something and I was telling one of the ladies I want to go back to school for another course because I need that balance. (Sabrina)

The satisfaction that you get from learning and understanding and being able to retain that is different than the satisfaction that you get from working. It’s a completely different type of development and those same areas, that continuous learning, and those things still motivate me. (Charity)

The above comments showcase the classroom environment as a space for nourishing the learning spirit. It was evident that seeds were planted throughout the courses that inspired and prompted intellectual growth. Nurturing the intellectual component of self was described as important for individual balance. For Sabrina, this learning journey indeed brought a sense of balance that she described as nurturing. Moreover, as Charity noted, she found balance within the satisfaction that comes with personal development. Charity continued by describing the courses as an opportunity to recognize “the importance of invoking thought and being inspired and inspiring moments, and these courses specifically there was a lot of inspirational moments.” This desire to learn that Charity described is inspired by the holistic learning environment that allows women to bring their whole-selves into the educational milieu. Angelica expressed the importance of this in the following comments:

I don't know what I'm talking about if I'm not talking about Aboriginal issues. I just feel like I do not fit, like I don't belong, like I'm writing in this territory that I don't even identify with so I always have to put it back into an Aboriginal perspective, because that's where I understand myself. Even what I learned in the Gidayaamin program—I'm not book smart I learn with my hands I learn by seeing and hearing, using my ears, and my whole heart absorbs the information and that's where it comes from. It doesn't come from someone standing there and doing the talking at me. I have to be involved in it and sharing and that's what I remember. That's what fuels like my fire. (Angelica)

The Aboriginal courses that I took were very holistic, and the way of teaching. They taught a lot about the medicine wheel and the four directions and to really

cherish our land. And I think they went back to like who we are as people. And I agree with Natalie they all change you, and make you grow, and make you think in a different way. Coming to school I didn't recognize that we were all colonized. I didn't understand that and now I'm working to decolonize myself and I see that because it's like we're kind of working to take education in our own hands and to make it our own again...and I feel like there's more of an understanding in the Aboriginal classes where we're kind of all equal. We're able to share our experiences and when I first came to university, first year I didn't talk at all like unless we were in small classes like this. (Angelica)

It is important to note that Indigenous-centred learning may not be a natural or immediate fit for all Indigenous learners and there may be some resistance to holistic curriculum. For example, as Charity pointed out, the shift from mainstream education to an Indigenous educational program was initially challenging:

Before going back to school, I had placed no value or any thought what-so-ever on the spiritual or intellectual person and that level of disconnect is very almost necessary I feel in Western culture in that you're not allowed to have a well-connected experience because everything is very segregated. And growing up that way I maintained that mentality of... you can have all these different experiences, but they are not to interfere or connect to each other in any way. You don't bring your religion to work, you need to be very segregated in order to be successful and the better you are at separating those things the more successful you will be. So, the idea of having emotional experiences in school was very new to me and was very hard because then you're processing at a whole different level and in a

completely different way. And that took a lot of practice because I didn't know how to do that. So, trying to make those connections in class was hard. (Charity)

Despite the challenge that Charity described, the consensus was that the courses were indeed transformative. Charity continued by noting the transformative effect of the emotional learning component:

It gives you the level of connection, even with your classmates, you're connecting on a different level and then it makes you want to be more involved with things outside of that because you know the impact that it has. Yea, it was different and it changed me.

The personal transformation described above is a prevalent theme that demonstrates the intellectual and emotional growth prompted by meaningful education. The following theme explores personal transformation further through an understanding of transformative learning. Moreover, I explore personal transformation further in Chapter 6 in the holistic well-being theme.

Transformative Learning

They all change you, and make you grow, and make you think in a different way. (Angelica)

Angelica's comment, similar to Charity's above, describes a personal transformation prompted by the courses. Several of the other women described their learning journeys in the Gidayaamin program or individual courses as transformative. This theme includes the following subthemes: Evidence of Personal Transformation, Intellectual Discovery and Empowerment, Finding Voice, Finding Purpose, and Life Changing and Reconstructing Oneself.

Evidence of Personal Transformation

The following quotations attest to the personal transformation that several of the women described:

I feel like I kind of found my voice in first year and I was able to talk I don't know if it was the growth in the year and the way I changed and I came so far I can't I think it was because of what I was being taught and how I was changing but I can't really pinpoint what it was that made me like transform so much it's like the logo the butterfly, I was like a caterpillar and then I transformed into this butterfly like I seriously feel that way I do. It is amazing! I'm so happy that I was able to take that program. It changed my life! (Angelica)

You really get to grow, which is a huge thing for me....In all the Aboriginal courses, you leave a little bit changed, which is important because then you're working on yourself and how you're going to contribute eventually when you get done with school. I feel like a lot of the Aboriginal studies courses have changed me for the better like if you look at me in first year, oh my gosh what a mess, but I feel like I'm still growing. (Natalie)

In response to the women's descriptions, Grandmother Shirley articulated, "I'm hearing and listening to all of you here, it's really like transforming isn't it, that's what I'm hearing. I think of how so many other women coming up can be impacted by this." Grandmother Shirley's words offer an affirmation of the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a transformative teaching and learning engagement.

Intellectual Discovery and Empowerment

I had teachers in high school say I would never go to university and I was more of a college level you will never be able to handle university—and that discouraged me a lot and then when I got back to school and I took your program and realized no, I can do this. It's what you put in and then when you're empowered and have that holistic education and you are free to have an opinion ... you really do thrive. (Angelica)

Intellectual discovery and empowerment is a profound theme that was evident in the sharing circles. This theme provides insights into the transformative effect of a decolonizing curriculum. Similar to Angelica's experience, noted above, I also was discouraged from considering university as a possibility by my guidance counsellors in high school. This appeared to be a common experience for the participants whose narratives illustrate that intellectual discovery comes from meaningful engagement and culturally relevant curriculum. The following comments express this phenomenon:

I know it sounds silly but when I went back to school after all those years, I know it sounds silly but it was realizing I was capable of formulating thought. And that was crazy! I haven't been thinking all these years, well I have been thinking, but I was going to school and I was telling people my thoughts and ideas and they were valued and they were actually things "like things!" I was a chambermaid before and had to make so many beds and clean so many toilets and I didn't have to think about anything but providing for my family, but when I went to school and I remembered that I was capable of thinking things or piecing things together to

formulate some sort of opinion on something that was empowering for me.

(Sabrina)

Sherry came to new realizations about herself and her intellect through the courses: “going through these courses and understanding that...I’m smart, I have something to say and people are going to hear me.” She also described this realization as an awakening that prompted her to continue learning and speaking out on Indigenous issues. Angelica’s discovery was also expressed when she considered her own journal reflections that she had reread a month prior to the sharing circle. As she noted, she was shocked at her own deep level of reflection.

The comments in this section showcase the power of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and holistic learning environments for Indigenous learners. I position my classes as learning exchanges between all in the classroom. Within every class, students are prompted to reflect and apply the material and discussions to self, family, and community or to current events. These meaningful connections encourage participation and prompt connections within the learning environment. This is evident in the following comment:

It came from that developing identity and connection to spirit and then developing thought from a different perspective so the thoughts and the intellectual ability had more of a connection to who I was as opposed to “this is what the textbook said and it’s something very outside of myself.” Once you start connecting with all of that stuff and then developing thought, it has so much more power to it because then you believe in it and it comes from more places, more experiences,

and you have the freedom in these types of settings to express that without the fear of judgement. (Charity)

Discovering one's own intellectual strengths is indeed transformative. This was also connected to a personal passion for Indigenous issues and presented the women with opportunities to express their newfound strengths as described in the following subsections.

Finding Voice

"I definitely found my voice." (Sherry)

Throughout the sharing circles, several of the women, including Sherry, described finding their voices and using them within different contexts. This is also evidence of the personal transformation described earlier.

When I first started I was so shy like I didn't even want to talk to people. I was so scared to do presentations, I was terrified and then throughout the course I was able to get my voice....I was that closed shy person that would have never spoken in front of a large group of people. And now in class you can't get me to shut up.

I'll keep talking if given the chance to, so that's my journey. (Jessica)

Later in the circle Jessica also described this as an "awakening":

I was very shy when I started the program and throughout and maybe the second month I was in the program it was like an awakening you couldn't shut me up and that's something I learned, not to suppress yourself and your voice.

Finding her voice and learning not to suppress her voice is indeed something that Jessica has carried in her sweetgrass basket as she has used it as a presenter at university conferences and workshops to speak out about missing and murdered Indigenous women

and girls. This sentiment was expressed by many of the women who, like Jessica, went from being shy and closed to open and confident and who have begun to use their voices to speak out about social justice issues. This is also evident in Sherry's comment: "the more I had validation in what I was saying and how I was feeling, the louder my voice became, and the stronger my voice became. And now you can't shut me up."

As the following comment illustrates, the literature helped the women find voice as they could identify with the lived realities described by the authors:

It really helped my well-being because that was a missing component for me, like my identity and finding my voice and really from these women, and like I said Morningstar Mercredi and all them like having hard issues to talk about but knowing how to talk about it and that it needs to be talked about, like we can no longer be silent. (Sherry)

The above comment is also connected to well-being, which I explore in Chapter 6, but it is important to note the connection identified in this quotation with the literature and finding voice as a pathway to well-being. Others talked about the importance of finding voice in connection with advocacy and activism. For example, Sherry noted that finding her voice has "been very instrumental in my activism and like I said before the fact that I found my voice and that I know that what I have to say is worth listening to." Angelica added:

It's always hard to kind of find your voice and then you find it...you finally do something about it so you can finally spread that awareness and do that consciousness raising that we're supposed to do as Native people to heal.

The connection that finding voice has with advocacy and activism leads well into the next subtheme, which explores the purpose many of the women discovered within their journeys in the courses and throughout the overall Gidayaamin program.

Finding Purpose

It's just given me a purpose... now I have a goal because before I entered and took any of these courses and just like doing things like going to work paying bills, I didn't really have any higher purpose and now I feel like I do, which is so important. (Natalie)

Like Natalie, several of the women expressed that they had found their purpose through the program. As Victoria explained, "that happiness and my purpose in life was missing" prior to taking the courses as part of the Gidayaamin program. The next two comments from Angelica and Jessica relate directly to giving back to community and this desire is something that all of the women expressed as I will describe in the Community Involvement and Giving Back to Community theme in Chapter 6.

I know where my passions lie and I feel better than I've ever felt and I know who I am, like I still struggle with it but I'm in a much better place than I was I know I want to be involved in community and I know I want to be involved with culture and that just keeps fueling my fire to keep going. (Angelica)

After I finished the program, I started participating in the social justice forum at Brock every year this will be my third year that I'm going to do it. The first year we did it on Indigenous women and wounded bears, last year I did it on the missing and murdered Indigenous women. And recently I took it upon myself, I wanted to do something, and it was summer time and I was thinking "what can I

do? I want to do something.” So, on October 4th the National day to honour Sisters in Spirit, I worked with another professor and we did a screening of the Highway of Tears here at Brock. So, it’s been getting my voice out there. There are other projects that I’ve done too. I was also asked to do a gender studies panel and speak about MMIW as well. I think it’s giving me that voice to say “this is something that I’m passionate about. This is something that I want to speak about. This is what I want to do.” And I think that’s what I’m giving back to my community. (Jessica)

Several others noted that they have now considered graduate studies as a way to continue their education and better position them to give back to the community or to contribute to Indigenous education. For example, as Charity noted:

When I started there was no chance in hell that I would have even considered doing a master’s, and after completing the program I realized that I need to do that. That’s something that I need to do both to prove to myself that I can and to open up other opportunities and doors for continuing this process of creating something new for the education system.

Like finding voice, finding purpose is embedded in connections with the literature that inspire meaningful engagement and a sense of place within the university. This is apparent in the following comment by Laura who noted personal connections in the courses: “This has helped me in a way that has changed my path on a direction where I fit in. This literature has opened my eyes to a whole new level of spiritual learning.” Finding purpose is directly related to the next subtheme as several women, such as Laura, explained they have taken a new direction prompted by their experience in the courses.

Life Changing and Reconstructing Oneself

I began this theme, Transformative Learning, with the subtheme Personal Transformation and then shared contributions that attest to the Intellectual Discovery and Empowerment that a lot of women found not only in the curriculum but also in the connections that transpired within the class community. It is evident that for many of the women, the courses were life changing and this demonstrates a powerful connection between transformative learning through Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy to personal well-being and community well-being. Thus, I will explore this further in the well-being section but will end this theme by sharing three profound quotations that express this life-changing transformation as described by the participants. Laura expressed, “When I started your class I was actually in an abusive relationship and it empowered me to start my life over.” Similarly, Angelica articulated:

I can’t imagine my life without the program like I really don’t know where I would be if I didn’t take it because at that point in my life I was coming out of a really bad relationship and I moved home for the program and now I have some such a different view and philosophy on how I see the world. (Angelica)

The following comment by Leigh is also a powerful testament to personal transformation:

When I took the course, I was a mother and a housekeeper and a cook and a maid and when I left this course I was a woman an Indigenous woman who chose to be a mother who was choosing to be a partner and a warrior to revitalize her culture and her language when I left the course I didn’t recognize myself but it was oddly strange that I was more familiar with myself than I had ever been. (Leigh)

Indeed, many of the learners experienced a personal transformation, and discovered their intellectual strengths by finding their voices and a new purpose. They expressed this new purpose in their desires to become more involved in Indigenous community well-being.

The Medicines Have Been Gathered

This chapter presented the three themes that woven together create the essence of the Sweetgrass Baskets: Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, Foundation for Indigenous-Centred Learning and Success, and Transformative Learning. It is within the classroom and safe Homeplace of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy that the women were prompted to gather medicines (spiritual and cultural lessons) that were placed in their own sweetgrass baskets to be carried home to their families and communities. The next chapter, “Carrying the Baskets Home and Planting the Seeds” describes the effects of the women’s cultural identity development as it relates to community involvement and holistic well-being. As the women carry their sweetgrass baskets home, I ask readers to consider the gifts they carry home to their families and communities.

CHAPTER 6: CARRYING THE BASKETS HOME AND PLANTING SEEDS

In Mexico, a story is told of La Llarona. It is told that she wanders throughout the land, looking for her lost children. Her voice is the wind. She weeps and moans and calls to the children of her blood. She is the Indian, the mother of our blood, the grandmother of our hearts. She calls to us. “Come home, come home” she whispers, she cries, she calls to us. She comes into that sacred place we hold inviolate. She is birthing us in that sacred place. “Come home, come home,” the voice of the umbilical, the whisper of the placenta. “Come home, come home.” We listen. And we write. (B. Brant, 1997, p. 205)

The above excerpt from Beth Brant’s (1997) “The Good Red Road: Journeys of Homecoming in Native Women’s Writing” captures the essence of Indigenous women’s “homecoming.” In B. Brant’s article, she positions Indigenous women’s literature as a site of homecoming as the writing comes from a “sacred place” and responds to the maternal whispers that call Indigenous women home. During the pilot study, Grandmother Lorene also drew attention to these maternal whispers. I shared her words in the Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy section by describing an exchange with Sabrina when Grandmother Lorene noted, “It’s coming home. And right now, listening to you, it’s just like a prayer to all those grandmothers... that maternal energy.... It’s like coming home, coming home to your spirit you’re coming home.” This chapter documents the women’s stories of “coming home” in the following themes: Cultural Identity, Community Involvement and Giving Back to Community, and Well-Being.

Cultural Identity

The courses really gave me an opportunity to experience a healthy strong identity for myself so I tell people that when I came out of the Gidayaamin program that I was the strongest I have ever been my whole life. (Sabrina)

I feel as though this course was a stepping stone for me in discovering myself as a Métis student, mother and community member. The related topics discussed in class allowed me to connect myself to these things. (Laura)

Identity is an integral theme of this study. As noted, this research is informed by Kim Anderson's (2000) theory of identity formation for Indigenous women as well as the other identity theorists noted in the literature review. As I journeyed through the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, many facets of identity arose. Thus, understanding identity is a core element to my pedagogical approach.

In Chapter 4, I presented the women's journeys to and within university as a foundational theme to understanding Indigenous women's cultural identity because it provides insights into the realities of Indigenous women as well as their perceptions of self upon entering university. As I noted in Chapter 4, Grandmother Lorene described the participants' educational experiences with Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as akin to a women's lodge, a place where women would go to learn about life skills and "mature their seed." Grandmother Lorene's description sheds light on the personal transformations and the development of the participants' cultural identities. To revisit and sum up that initial theme that described women's journeys to and within university, many of the participants noted that this journey began with a yearning to discover oneself, to rebuild, and to connect or re-connect with their culture.

Other aspects of identity such as identifying as a student, mother, and community member, as noted in Laura's quotation above, are interconnected and cross many of the themes in varying and overlapping ways. To capture the complexities with these intersections of the women's identity roles and to honour their stories, I have chosen not to separate the categories (mother, student, and community member) here as subthemes but rather leave them together and within the contexts presented by the participants. To separate these facets of one's identity would be to de-compartmentalize rather than to think about them as components of oneself that overlap and intersect in a myriad of ways. My teaching approach is based on a holistic model (J. Brant, 2011) that embraces the identities of Indigenous women including all components of self and roles such as student, mother, and community member. These roles that the women hold in different ways are further expressed in the holistic well-being theme where the roles are also left unseparated. This theme is presented in the following subthemes: Desire to Learn about Indigenous Women's Cultural Identity; Perceived Lack of Cultural Identity; Traditional Introduction; Home Community, Nation, and Clan; A Recognition of Being; Affirmations of Cultural Identity; and Internal Racism and Identity Conflict. It is a wavering path the women walk as they travel with their sweetgrass baskets, and I have attempted to best capture their journeys along that path with the order of the subthemes. For this reason, I begin with the desire to learn more about their cultural identities and document their steps toward a recognition of being and end this theme with some of the identity complexities the women continue to sort out as they journey forward.

Desire to Learn about Indigenous Women's Cultural Identity

As outlined earlier, the participants noted that a desire to learn about cultural identity was a motivating factor that prompted their decisions to register for the Gidayaamin program or the other Indigenous studies courses. For example, Laura stated, “I wanted to take your class so badly because I wanted to find out about my roots I wanted to find out about my culture.” This desire is further expressed in the following comments:

I didn't really know much about my background and that's why I wanted to take most of the classes so for me it was kind of like locating myself or trying to figure out who I was as an Aboriginal person and as an Aboriginal woman. So (the courses) helped me have a better understanding of what our people went through.... who we were and how we overcame things. (Jessica)

In the ABST 3P80, the Aboriginal mothering course, I remember going in there...and I want to learn about Aboriginal mothering because that was taken away and then I remember you saying, “this isn't to learn about how to mother but it's to learn about the realities of Indigenous mothering.” Going into the course I had a lot of ideas of Aboriginal, Native, Indigenous—whatever term you want to use—mothering, but what does that mean, am I supposed to fit into this box, and so the course kind of helped me reflect on who I am as an Aboriginal mother. (Sherry)

Shannon elaborated on a similar desire by noting it is also connected to her role as a mother: “self-discovery of uncovering who I am and knowing where I came from and knowing where my roots are planted is so significant to me and it's very important for me

to be able to raise my own children that way and give them those things.” Sabrina, Charity, and Jessica also expressed this connection between cultural identity and their roles as mothers.

At times, a desire to learn more about cultural identity can be complicated by fear and feelings of inadequacy or nonbelonging. This tension sometimes serves as a barrier to participation. Therefore, there is a need for a safe and welcoming space that embraces cultural growth, especially at the initial stages as participants began their educational journeys at the postsecondary level.

Perceived Lack of Cultural Identity

A perceived lack of cultural identity was described by several of the participants who noted feelings of unworthiness or a hesitancy to associate with Indigenous community prior to taking the courses and the Gidayaamin program. Charity described her initial experience at university as follows:

I didn’t even know while I was at Guelph that they had Aboriginal Student Services. At the time, I don’t even know if I would have been able to associate myself with Aboriginal student services for fear that I was not enough.

However, she noted that she overcame these feelings as she continued to gain confidence in her cultural identity through the courses. Charity noted that she hopes to use her experience to make change so others don’t feel the same sense of culturally inadequacy:

Going through the courses, I was able to have confidence in [my cultural self] and that journey that everybody is on and that that’s okay, it makes you want to go and make those changes so that other students don’t have those experiences.

Similarly, Angelica described this feeling of inadequacy prior to taking the Gidayaamin program and pointed out that the safe space of the classes helped her gain confidence in who she was as an Indigenous woman:

I came in the door knowing nothing and feeling kind of like an outsider, like I don't know [the culture]. I was very very overwhelmed and I felt that when I was walking in the doors too, like "are people going to laugh at me? Are they going to wonder why is she here?" I didn't know because that's how I felt in life. I felt very low about myself and I really didn't have any confidence so that's why coming into the classroom it really helped me to feel a sense of pride in finding out who I was as a person.

Although several of the women walked in with similar feelings, the program prompted a recognition of being. For some, this recognition began with learning their traditional introduction and for others with locating themselves culturally by connecting with their nation, clan, or traditional community. I therefore discuss those two subthemes to provide context for my subsequent discussion of the recognition of being that participants experienced.

Traditional Introduction

When I sat on the first day of ABST 2P17, Jennifer stood up, shared her Mohawk name with us and where she came from. This made me realize that I had a lot to learn not just about literature but about myself. (Laura)

When I heard [her] introduce herself in the language, I was like "oh my god! That's amazing! She knows who she is! This is who I want to be or I should be."
(Sherry)

As the above comments show, for several of the participants, learning their traditional introduction was the first step toward cultural identity development. This was an important initial step in my own decolonizing journey and I vividly recall the empowerment I felt when I learned how to do my own traditional introduction. I have since made a commitment to open the courses I teach in this way. This is also the manner in which I begin all my academic work. In Chapter 1, I opened with my traditional introduction and noted that this introduction encompasses Indigenous ways of being and honours my ancestors who support me in my learning journey. This is a lesson I articulate when I open my courses as well.

Sherry who describes the amazement she felt hearing another instructor open class with a traditional introduction on her first day in the Gidayaamin program has now learned to introduce herself in her language. She expressed this during the sharing circle when she began with her traditional introduction in her language and followed with the English translation:

Ahnii, Sherry n'dizhnikaaz. My name is Good Heart my English name is Sherry, I'm Bear Clan from Cape Croker and I'm an Anishnaabee woman....Before I had gone [through the program] I didn't know anything about who I was. I knew I had Native parents and I had a reserve that I visited, but that was pretty much it. I didn't know much else and I remember my first class the instructor introduced herself in the language and I decided I was going to learn how to do that—I was like that's my first step. And so, I'm proud to say I can do that now! Not that I can say much more [in the language], but I can actually do that.

The above comments highlight the connection between language and identity. For many Indigenous people, the ability to simply introduce yourself in your own language is a huge step toward reclaiming identity. As Sherry noted, this was her first step. For many it is a hard step and it is wrought with emotion. The loss of language among Indigenous people is part of the colonial legacy. Thus, recent movements to reclaim language are a significant component of decolonization (Battiste, 2013). Language and traditional introductions are intertwined with Indigenous identity and sovereignty. But as the above contributions demonstrate, they are also part of a journey toward reclaiming oneself. This was expressed throughout the sharing circles, especially by way of traditional introductions as several of the women introduced themselves and their spirit names.

Leigh, who has been deeply engaged in her own language revitalization, introduced herself with a lengthier traditional introduction in her language and offered a short translation of what she has said: “*Kanikatsistha ni yonkyats. A’nó:wara niwaki’tarò:ten Kanyen’kehá:ka niwakonhwentsyò:ten*. My name is Little Fire, I’m Mohawk, Turtle Clan, and I said that I wanted to speak in Mohawk first because that’s important to me.” Sabrina, who described her experience in the Gidayaamin program as life changing, pointed out that she was gifted with a new name after completing the program. In this way, her educational journey, in a sense, was experienced as a cultural rite of passage and the gift of her new name reflects that passage:

Ahnii, Zhoonge de Kwe n’dizhnikaaz. Strong-hearted woman is my spirit name and I didn’t get that name until after my first year of university. Before that I had the name *Wikwemikong n’doonjiba*, that meant the bad one and I certainly lived up to that name for all of my life. (Sabrina)

The significance of the traditional introduction is also evident in Jessica's comment that the women shared this teaching with one another: "We learn from other students too because Sabrina taught me how to introduce myself in the language and then I taught Natalie how to do it."

The women were not specifically taught their traditional introduction as part of the curriculum. Rather this was something the women took upon themselves to learn and thus offers a valuable lesson about the seeds of empowerment that can be planted within a space of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. The act of the students teaching this lesson to one another also attests to the reciprocal component of Indigenous education that aligns with the cultural value of reciprocity, which I will discuss further in the holistic well-being theme.

Home Community, Nation, and Clan

Cultural identity is deeply connected to one's home community, nation, and clan. Of course, this is complicated by the many disruptions associated with colonial displacement. This sense of home community can also be found within urban settings where this research and the courses take place. For some participants, their journeys involved locating themselves by finding out where they were from, and the community, nation, or clan to which they belonged. In many ways, this act of locating provides a sense of belonging that is also connected to cultural identity. As Jessica noted, locating can also be an ongoing process:

I'm still trying to locate myself I'm going to say locating because um I had to find out like who I was what clan was I from all that kind of stuff so I'm trying to locate and I still find it's still a journey for me like it's not done yet like I'm not

done learning about who I am but. Do I feel a difference within myself? Yea I do because now I can start applying that stuff in my home and with my kids and with my life and with my community, so if I go back home or even here I can have conversations with Elders and actually understand what they're talking about and understand what things mean. I didn't understand any of that before so now I'm still learning but I feel a difference. (Jessica)

For Jessica, this act of identifying and "locating" provided her with personal connections to her home community and traditions, as well as connections with the local community in Niagara. Her comment also drew attention to the many communities and different ways community can be defined. For Jessica, the development of cultural identity gave her the confidence to find a sense of belonging within multiple communities.

The colonial influence on a sense of belonging to one's community, nation, and clan is evident in the following:

Right now I'm actually in a really weird position because I just, I literally know all about the matrilineal society and my status card says I'm Mohawk, and I was talking to my grandma and she was like do you not realize that you're not Mohawk you're really Tuscarora and I'm like what and she's like yea when you talk sometimes I'm just like what is she talking about I'm from Cattaraugus okay so that's where you're from, you're not from Six Nations that's where your grandfather is from, so right now my education is teaching me about who I am and I'm trying to break away from that patriarchal influence. (Angelica)

Angelica brings up the issue of status that has and continues to disrupt Indigenous identity and belonging. For her, a very confusing and emotionally difficult conversation with her grandmother was made easier to understand because of what she has learned through her Indigenous studies courses. However, when Angelica introduced herself at the beginning of the circle she had stated, “I’m Mohawk, Six Nations, I don’t have a clan. I’m still working on finding out who I am in that sense.” Although she still identifies with what her status card has defined her as, it is evident that she is on a journey to uncovering more about her Indigenous identity.

A Recognition of Being

In the preface to Kim Anderson’s (2000) book, *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*, she described that the phrase “a recognition of being” came from her interview with Elder Shawani Campbell Star. Anderson noted Campbell Star had “clarified that Native womanhood is not about simply playing certain roles, or adopting a pre-set identity; rather it is an ongoing exercise that involves mental, physical, spiritual, and emotion elements of our being” (p. 9). It was evident that the Gidayaamin program and courses prompted an ongoing recognition of being for all of the participants. For those who were already immersed in their cultural traditions, they learned more about their roles as Indigenous women and the interconnections this had with other facets of their identities. Kim Anderson’s (2000) book, *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* and the identity formation theory she presents in the book have been a driving force behind the development of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. I noted my personal connection with her book in Chapter 1 and have described my use of her theory of identity formation as a pedagogical approach in the courses I

teach. The following contributions shed light on the value of the book from the women's perspectives:

That book in general was one of the pivotal points in my realization that, crap I don't have an identity, I've allowed myself to separate everything so far that it doesn't connect, I just do these things but I'm not a part of these things. (Charity)

For Charity, the book prompted her to develop a strong cultural identity for herself and share that with her children. She noted, "you have to put thought into who you are and that's an important part and then to have confidence in who you are and where you're at. Having that confidence allowed me to be able to become a community member." I explore this connection between cultural identity and community in the holistic well-being theme.

Including Kim Anderson's (2000) theory of identity formation as a guiding theoretical framework for the courses has empowered the participants to reclaim themselves, understand colonial processes, and approach their own healing in gentle ways. Jessica and Angelica also described their personal connections with Kim Anderson's identity formation theory. Jessica noted, "I used Kim Anderson's theory to kind of figure out who I was... reclaiming myself as well." Angelica extended Jessica's comment by illustrating her personal application of the theory:

I think in terms of Kim Anderson's theory and what it has to do with women's identities and relating it to personal experiences, the resisting of stereotypes and reclaiming who you are and putting it into action so you're doing something in order to change those negative definitions of Indigenous women through truth telling. I think that in itself is very powerful and empowering and that's how it has

shaped my own cultural identity. It's kind of made me proud and I've been able to embrace my own identity and... just helped me to be able to, I feel, I don't know how to put it into words, well I think it's helped me to talk about identity and specifically to who I am.

The use of Kim Anderson's theory along with the literature in the course provided a gentle yet contextualized way for the women to understand and come to terms with the realities of Indigenous womanhood as well as intergenerational trauma. This is an important process for healing and cultural identity acceptance. For example, Leigh articulated, "It encouraged me and allowed me to educate myself on what it means to be an Indigenous woman in this world and it opened my eyes to the struggles that all Indigenous women are going through." Leigh also noted that while she always understood that there was intergenerational trauma, the courses affirmed and deepened her understanding. Other women were able to come to terms with some of the trauma in their own families. As an example, Shannon noted, "I'm able to dig through my family and everything that has happened in my life and discover where those roots are and how it's gotten to be the way it is."

This colonial understanding also provided the women with a sense of pride in understanding the resilience of Indigenous women and families. The shift from cultural shame to pride is embedded in understanding the historical context and carrying cultural strengths forward. This shift is expressed in the following comment by Natalie: "Just having the knowledge and knowing why my grandmother was the way she was and why they were so full of shame...there is so much shame there but my sisters and I we're like very proud now."

After reviewing the women's narratives and reflecting on my teaching praxis and my delivery of the course through the identity formation theory, the women's personal connections are a powerful testament to the use of the theory as a transformative pedagogical tool that promotes personal investment in learning. I present the theory to students during the first class to serve as a foundation for the course. When I present the theory, I provide a brief explanation of the theory as outlined by Anderson (2000) who proposed that "Native women engage in a process of self-definition," which includes "resisting negative definitions of being; reclaiming Aboriginal tradition; constructing a positive identity by translating tradition into the contemporary context; and acting on that identity in a way that nourishes the overall well-being of our communities" (p. 15). This theory is one to which many Indigenous women students in the course might relate. It also serves as a valuable teaching tool for non-Indigenous students who come to understand how colonial attitudes about Indigenous women have shaped contemporary realities. Thus, during this introductory lesson, I involve students in listing some of the "negative definitions of being" that Indigenous women resist, and some of the positive "definitions of being" that Indigenous women are reclaiming. I revisit this exercise throughout the courses as I help the students make connections with the resist, reclaim, construct, and act components of the theory and apply them to specific course readings.

As the above contributions demonstrate, the participants naturally found their own personal meaning and connections with this theory that prompted a recognition of being and supported the development of their cultural identities. When I reflect on the ways in which I applied the theory throughout the course, the push for personal connections was subtle. For example, the women could write about personal connections to the course

readings in their journals and many students chose to deconstruct these readings with the theory as a guiding lens to understand Indigenous women's experiences. With this in mind, personal connections to the theory have shaped the women's cultural identities in profound ways outlined in the subthemes below. The women's connections to Kim Anderson's theory are also noted further in the Community Involvement and Giving Back to Community theme (see below) as participants related it to their understandings of community member roles, and the Well-Being theme (also below) as participants related it to personal, family, and holistic well-being.

Affirmations of Cultural Identity Development

The above subthemes provide evidence of the women becoming more culturally grounded. Although students entered the program or course at varying stages culturally, their growth is simply and directly expressed in the following comment:

As far as the cultural identity and the empowerment I think the courses hit the nail right on the head—I'm pretty sure a lot of people in this group feel the same way—and I've heard from other people who have gone through the program on the development of their cultural self. (Shannon)

The connection between learning about cultural identity in the courses with self-empowerment is evident in the following:

I know where my passions lie and I feel better than I've ever felt and I know who I am, like I still struggle with it but I'm in a much better place than I was. I know I want to be involved in community and I know I want to be involved with culture and that just keeps fueling my fire to keep going. (Angelica)

This sentiment is further explored in the Personal Well-Being subtheme of Holistic Well-Being.

Internal Racism

The challenge of developing self-identity is especially complex for Indigenous people, especially those who may be defined as mixed race or bi-racial and who have been historically defined as half-breeds. In terms of membership and belonging, the topic of Indigenous identity is politically charged and associated with levels of blood quantum and “Indian status.” I prompt students to consider the complexities associated with identity issues throughout my courses by working with Indigenous women’s literature that explores these complexities along with the associated internal racism and shame that has been experienced by the authors or characters.

In Search of April Raintree (Culleton, 1983) is a fictional story that follows the lives of two Métis sisters who grew up in separate foster care homes. April who was described as having a much lighter complexion than her sister Cheryl hid her Métis identity. In this book, April has grown to be ashamed of her Indigenous identity. *Half-Breed* (Campbell, 1973) presents the autobiography of Maria Campbell who also expresses her struggles as a Métis woman. In this book, Maria shares her childhood pride in her Cree-Métis identity but describes how she quickly grew ashamed when faced with the hatred and racism outside her small community. After marrying a non-Indigenous man as an escape, she finds that she does not become whole until she embraces her Indigenous identity. The students in my literature courses read *In Search of April Raintree* and *Half-Breed* and are expected to write journal reflections and participate in class activities to work through the many lessons the books have to offer. Internal racism

and identity crises are important lessons that are integral to understanding contemporary Indigenous cultural identities.

Grandmother Shirley discussed the issue of internal racism in the second sharing circle by drawing attention to people's denial of the non-Indigenous side of their identity:

I wonder what about the other side and that really is your own internal racism going on isn't it to deny that other side of you and that's really sad part to—to deny that other part of yourself—that was my struggle for a long time too.

Angelica noted that she struggled with internal racism as well, expressing that part of her struggle rests in her belief that it is important that she keep her Indigenous culture rich within herself and future children. Other participants noted that there is a pressure to keep a strong Indigenous bloodline that influences intimate partner and relationship choices. They noted that the video viewed in class “Club Native” (Deer, 2008), which discusses blood quantum issues and the marrying-out rule, helped them grapple with issues of Indian status and understand some of the root causes. In response, Grandmother Shirley reminded us that the “Non-Native partner is still part of that medicine wheel,” as are all parts of one's identity.

To demonstrate her point, Grandmother Shirley drew attention to a conversation with her grandson. She told us that in his own quest, she reminded him of the richness of both sides of his identity and the strength that comes from his non-Indigenous and Indigenous ancestors. She continued by stating “in time you have to acknowledge the richness of both your cultures. It's really valuable.” This is a really important lesson, but also a difficult one for those on a decolonizing journey. Grandmother Shirley's words offered lessons of humility and inspired self-love as she shared her own story of coming

to terms with her identity. As many Indigenous women are working through their own experiences of fractured identities, these lessons help facilitate our journeys to wholeness.

Community Involvement and Giving Back to Community

This theme, Community Involvement and Giving Back to Community, serves as one of the outcomes of an Indigenous-centred pedagogy. It aligns with my research questions identifying how Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy honours and embraces Aboriginal women's identities and roles as community members and how Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy fosters community engagement. Community engagement refers to the extent and ways women are involved with Indigenous communities (locally, nationally, or globally) and their participation in events, advocacy, activism, and other connections. This theme includes the following subthemes: Community Member Roles, Activism and Community Engagement, Advocacy, Desire to Make Change, Applying Course Material to Work, and Complexities of Community Work.

Community Member Roles

This subtheme outlines the women's understanding of their roles as community members. In some ways, these roles are also shaped by cultural identity development. For the most part, the comments I include in this subtheme responded to the question, "How has your experience in the course(s) influenced your understanding of yourself in relation to your role(s) as an Indigenous student, a mother, and/or a community member?"

Jessica who had described her journey in education as one of learning about herself as an Indigenous woman noted:

Now I can start applying that stuff in my home and with my kids and in my life and with my community, so if I go back home or even here I can have

conversations with Elders and actually understand what they're talking about and understand what things mean. I didn't understand any of that before.

Likewise, Charity noted that it was important for her to begin with learning her cultural identity within the safe space that the Indigenous curriculum and classroom environment offered and that gave her confidence in who she was: "Having that confidence allowed me to be able to become a community member, whereas before I didn't feel that I could do those things."

The connection between cultural identity development and community involvement is also evident in the following:

I often reflect on Kim Anderson's theory when reading articles or books written by Aboriginal people or about them. As my learning progresses about my own culture and identity, this has made me want to become more involved with my community and be a part of something with meaning. (Laura)

Sabrina who has always had a strong presence in her community noted, "Yes it has impacted my understanding as a community member" and motioning to her medicine pouch and her heart she continued by stating "my wampum beads remind me of the next seven generations. I'm doing everything based on what's in here and in here." Sabrina also explained her transition where she has moved from carrying anger and lashing out to being more responsible for her emotions:

What these courses taught me was to be responsible for my actions and my words and to be with a good mind and live in a good way as much as I can for myself, my family, and my community.

Sabrina also explained that she carries the teaching “that there should be no space between the values you hold and the way you behave.” She came to understand this teaching through the courses and noted “it *has* influenced my understanding of being a community member being a healthy productive community member.”

Sherry noted that after having a negative experience at an Indigenous community organization it was the lessons from the course as well as lessons from other women who had gone through similar experiences that prompted her to reconnect with community: “Feeling empowered as women, just learning about this and understanding the dysfunction in communities and how it is Indigenous women’s roles to keep community safe and together kind of streamlined me to being more involved in the community.”

In many ways, the women served as a support system for one another as they participated and became more comfortable with community involvement. Part of this took place in the form of activism especially in 2012 when the Idle No More movement began.

Activism and Community Engagement

Women were born awake. In their bodies lived the memories of their star-nation mother’s moment with Westwind. In their blood, coursed traces of old agreements. These traces nagged them until story awakened them. Through story, each generation of women schooled the next to solve crises, to enter into relationship with others, eyes wide open and hearts optimistic.... Through these stories the women learned to search the world for responses. They emulated the beings around them, and dodems were born. Helpers were acquired in the dark of huts made of sinew, in which red-hot stones sang extraordinary answers. Systems

were born in this way. Successful strategies were repeated in stories, shaping customs and beliefs into systems. The humans gained confidence through their endless discussions about direction and their successful speculation in response to problems. Belief in one another achieved a majesty all its own. Turtle island women had no reason to fear other humans. (Maracle, 2002, p. 14)

I use the above excerpt from the introduction of Lee Maracle's (2002) *Daughters Are Forever* and ask students in my INDG 2P17 *Reclaiming Indigenous Women's Literary Traditions and Educational Aspirations* and INDG 3P47 *Indigenous Women's Literature: Activism and Empowerment* courses to reflect on the quotation and consider meaning for both historical and contemporary Indigenous women's realities. There are many cultural lessons embedded in the excerpt that relate to honouring the matrilineal roles of Indigenous women and reclaiming rites of passage ceremonies. I have also connected the above excerpt to the Idle No More movement, as well as the racialized and sexualized violence of Indigenous women and girls. Idle No More began with four Indigenous women who inspired a national movement and brought Indigenous people from across Canada together toward a unified vision (Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014). It was a powerful experience and Sabrina captures this below as she noted finding herself at the front lines campaigning for social change:

2012 was when Idle No More happened but it was also the year that I took the Gidayaamin program, they were saying the world was supposed to end that year in 2012, and I remember being at City Hall in Niagara Falls and I was like I don't really know if the world is going to end or not it could possibly because people were saying it for a long time. And we were drumming in front of city hall and I

thought to myself “it’s not the end of the world it’s just the end of the world as I knew it to be.” During the Winter break at school I was somewhere everyday with Idle No More. I went all over the place and so many things happened. Being in university at that time helped and it really was the end, like a whole new world. I’ve been involved with all of them: the missing and murdered Indigenous women, the short hills, and there it was not always an advocate or activist, but part of the planning of those events, so what are we going to do and how are we going to do it. (Sabrina)

Sherry, who also took the program during the 2012–2013 academic year, recalled speaking at a rally to push for a national inquiry and promote awareness about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Sherry noted, “I didn’t become exposed to it until your class and I remember reading the story about Helen Betty Osbourne and I was enraged.” The students read about the brutal murder of Helen Betty Osbourne in Chapter 4 “Stereotypes and Dis-Membered Relations” of Janice Acoose’s (1995) *Iskwewak Kah’Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak Neither Indian Princesses nor Easy Squaw*. The story of Helen Betty Osbourne who was killed by four White men in 1971 is also shared in Amnesty International’s (2004) *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada* that documents the history of racialized and sexualized violence against Indigenous women in Canada. For Sherry, it is important to speak out about these issues to make sure the stories of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls are not forgotten. Sherry’s commitment and passion for raising awareness is evident in her poem “To My Sister I Have Never Met” (Emmerson, 2016), which was recently published in the collection *Forever Loved*:

Exposing the Hidden Crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada (Lavell-Harvard & J. Brant, 2016). Having her poem published attests to her commitment to activism and her passion for Indigenous women's social justice. Moreover, the activism and community engagement described by the participants is evidence that "story" has indeed "awakened them" (Maracle, 2002, p. 14).

Advocacy

The act of giving back to the community also took place in the form of advocacy as some of the women noted their work brought awareness to a variety of issues affecting Indigenous communities. I distinguish advocacy from activism to include initiatives that took place to raise awareness about social justice issues without campaigning at the front lines but rather supporting and advocating for change through community venues. Jessica described how she started participating in a social justice forum and leading workshops on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada and noted this is something she would have never imagined herself doing because she was "that closed shy person that would have never spoken in front of a larger group of people." Jessica continued to speak out about these issues as a panelist and workshop presenter. She noted, "I have that advocacy spirit in me just to create awareness or to stop the hurt in our community....I think that's where my journey has brought me just to say enough is enough." This commitment is evident in her chapter "Understanding the Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada" (Riel-Johns, 2016), published in the collection, *Forever Loved: Exposing the Hidden Crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada* (Lavell-Harvard & J. Brant, 2016). Moreover, her chapter ends with a section describing her journey to coming to know about the issue

of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada in the literature course and immediately becoming inspired to change this reality of violence.

Charity also noted the importance of community involvement in connection with advocacy. For her, awareness and connecting with people to identify community needs was important. As she noted earlier, it was the courses that opened up a pathway for her to become involved with community and develop those connections. She now sees herself moving in the direction of advocacy work and program development to meet community needs. Angelica talked about serving as an Indigenous youth representative at the provincial level to advocate for culturally relevant programming and services.

All of these women are now making contributions through community involvement and advocacy work. With the exception of three participants who were already involved in some form of activism or community advocacy, community involvement and advocacy work was something the women were inspired to do after taking the courses. For some, the courses were a pathway to feeling comfortable enough to become involved in community engagement and for others the awareness of social justice issues inspired them to work for awareness and change.

Desire to Make Change

I've always had a big fire within me that I wanted to make change somehow.

There needs to be change. (Leigh)

Community involvement was also discussed by the participants who described their desire to make a difference or contribute to community well-being through education. This was best expressed in the following comments by Sherry and Natalie, which I also included in the belief in education section. Sherry articulated, "My vision

going through school has always been to get some form of education to help my people and bring me back to my people.” Similarly, Natalie noted, “I’m hoping to go to grad school next year for policy writing so I’m hoping that that’s something that will affect the community once I reach the workforce.”

The connection between learning about identity, community well-being, and cultural traditions and sharing that knowledge with community is evident in the following comment by Angelica:

So now that I have that knowledge it is my responsibility to pass it down to share that knowledge with my family with fellow classmates, non-Indigenous and Indigenous, and to continue to learn. I have a responsibility to respect the knowledge I have but also to keep learning and practicing what I’ve learned so to give it back to the community.

Angelica also noted feeling a sense of responsibility through her course work to address Indigenous issues in other courses by focusing on Indigenous topics for essays and presentations. Moreover Jessica, Angelica, and Natalie noted bringing forward Indigenous literature from these courses and encouraging other professors to incorporate the literature in their courses to provide a background or understanding of Indigenous perspectives. Finally, Sabrina expressed her responsibility within the community noting, “I’m bringing the holistic back to my community.”

Applying Course Material to Work

Not only did the women talk about applying the lessons from the courses into other courses but several of them also talked about how they have applied these lessons into their work environments. For example, Sherry taught her clients how to do their own

traditional introductions in the Anishnaabee language, which is something she was prompted to learn as a result of the class. Sabrina talked about applying her lessons in her volunteer work on a board of directors as well as in her position at an Indigenous organization but particularly with the women's drum group. I elaborate on her work with the drum group in the holistic well-being theme.

Complexities of Community Work

It's kind of like when the lightbulb goes on and you can't turn it off. You can't go back you can only go forward. That can be a little bit daunting at times too.

(Grandmother Shirley)

The above statement captures some of the comments I noted earlier about feeling a sense of responsibility to address Indigenous issues through coursework (Angelica) and apply them within Indigenous organizations (Sabrina). It can also be connected to the participants' contributions included in the finding purpose subtheme where participants largely expressed the desire to give back to the community through academic work, advocacy, and activism. As Charity commented, however, "it's the awareness in general of all of the issues, all of the socio-economic issues. We need help in every area so where do you start?" Community work can be very overwhelming and a "daunting" task, especially for students who are just thinking about starting their careers. Thus, Sabrina described community work as exhausting, especially with her children in tow, and yet essential:

As a community member, it exhausts me sometimes but I really understand the importance of walking my talk so if I am telling the people in the drum group or wherever I am in the community that these are the way things are, then that is the

way I should be acting or I should be behaving.... I'm always telling people it's so important to take pride in your community but that's also what has me so exhausted because I take them [her children] and I go everywhere and I do everything because if you don't have healthy active participants in your community then what kind of community is that.

Leigh also noted that there is no financial incentive associated with community work:

The hard part about being a community activist is that it doesn't pay very well; it pays nothing actually and everything comes out of your pocket and not too many people want to do that kind of work and it's very hard to do that.

These complexities of community work may also be connected to identity and belonging. In a sense, part of the need to feel like an accepted member of the community is further complicated by pressure to contribute and make a difference. Although some of the women were in employed positions that allowed them to contribute to community well-being through their paid work, others were not. For some, community work came at a personal cost as well because of the personal investment in community work. As Shannon noted, "It's hard especially when you're working for your family and your community sometimes you can't get away from those things." The following comment by Sabrina illustrates this complexity:

When I'm drumming that's healing for me so that's part of my self-care but I also have so much responsibility in that drum circle—so how do I get those two parts in balance—so I said I want to stop doing it as part of my job, I want to start doing it just to do it.

In response, Shannon pointed out:

When you're talking about drumming just to drum—let's go to another community and sit in on their drum group—it's almost like you have to remove yourself from the environment completely because you wear so many hats. Even to come and just participate—you're still that community helper—that mentor or whatever that is.

The above exchange attests to the blurred lines between worker, community helper, and community member. As Sabrina's comment makes evident, it is important for women to find balance, and that balance is embedded within cultural teachings about Indigenous womanhood. This highlights the need for more Indigenous women and community members to contribute to community work to eliminate the heavy workloads for small groups of women who typically carry the burdens. It also connects with the teaching that Grandmother Lorene shared during the pilot study on the women's need to learn how to say no. This lesson was also shared by Grandmother Shirley who reminded the participants that it is not selfish to take time for your own self-care.

Well-Being

I define well-being through a holistic understanding that includes balancing the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual components of self and also considers mainstream definitions of well-being that emphasize educational attainment and economic sufficiency. My sense of well-being is informed by the Haudenosaunee principle of *Ka'nikonhri:yo*, which teaches us to bring a “good mind” to all that we do. From the Anishnaabee perspective this principle is described as *Mino-biimaadiziwinan*, which is a belief in living “the good life” through a good mind and achieving a

harmonious balance of the mind, body, and spirit (Anderson, 2005; Newhouse & FitzMaurice, 2012).

I draw on A. Wilson (2004) whose research on Aboriginal women's cultural identity and wellness advances a holistic understanding that connects individual, family, and community well-being. According to A. Wilson, community wellness starts in the home with personal well-being, and then extends to relationships with others and to behaviours, and is also rooted within connections to cultural traditions. It is also important to understand that "well-being ripples from and through self...family...extended family...community...nation" (A. Wilson, 2004, p. 20), such that personal well-being extends to communal well-being and, at the same time, there is a reciprocal relationship whereby communal well-being affects personal well-being.

I shared the above teachings with the women in the sharing circles, who are also familiar with the principles of *Mino-biimaadiziwinan* and *Ka'nikonhrí:yo* as these teachings guide the ethical space of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. In sharing the above, it was my hope to provide the participants with a thorough and holistic understanding of well-being to effectively answer the following research question: How does Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy foster holistic well-being? As I sought to answer how Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy fostered cultural identity development, holistic well-being, academic success, and community engagement, I found that holistic well-being had a reciprocal relationship with all of the other three concepts. For example, a strong cultural identity fosters overall well-being, and well-being can further contribute to a healthy sense of cultural identity. This led to some overlaps in the themes as they were closely interrelated and interconnected, but I have tried to minimize the overlap as much as possible while

maintaining integrity to the research narrative. This theme is divided into the following subthemes: Emotional Well-Being, Personal Well-Being, Coming Home to Spirit, Family Well-Being, Holistic Well-Being, and Restoring the Balance.

Emotional Well-Being

This subtheme includes contributions related to the students' emotional well-being in terms of the emotions they carry with them into their educational experiences. This section on emotional well-being is not intended to present a psychological perspective of emotional well-being but rather a brief understanding of the emotional quadrant of the medicine wheel as expressed by participants.

This whole semester I've been like ripping my hair out pretty much and without the smudging, without the medicines I would literally go mad so I have to have that moment of clarity and if I didn't have the Gidayaamin program I would have never like I probably wouldn't even be in school because I contemplate dropping out all the time. (Angelica)

A journey into an educational program for Indigenous women is indeed an emotional experience as it takes emotional strength and resilience to successfully navigate the challenges that are undoubtedly faced along the way. Emotional strength and resilience were expressed by Laura, Sabrina, and Angelica who drew attention to the will to keep going and the importance of self-discovery in relation to a recognized expectation for Indigenous learners to be unsuccessful. For example, Laura noted "you're able to do it... despite everybody telling you that you can't you find it in yourself" (Laura). Sabrina expressed her experience of self-discovery with emotion as she realized she "was capable of thought" after being discouraged by guidance counsellors. She used her educational

experience as a tool of resistance in her will to keep moving forward and to encourage her peers. Moreover, Angelica's comment alludes to the importance of self-discovery as well:

I just try to always see the light at the end of the tunnel so there's some days when I'm just like I wanna give up I think this is too much but I know that I'm doing it for a reason and I have to stick it out.

The participants' contributions made it evident that the incorporation of traditional teachings and medicines throughout the courses promoted emotional well-being. Extending these cultural healing and wellness elements, emotional well-being was also related to the personal connections with Indigenous women's literature that showcased resilience and empowerment. For example, Natalie noted a preference for stories written by Indigenous authors as opposed to course material written about Indigenous women from an outsider perspective. As she noted, it was nice to read "from a perspective where they're not talking about how damaged we are but rather talking about the accomplishments and how resilient we are" (Natalie).

Along the lines of resilience, another participant noted that the courses were helpful in offsetting shame. Sherry described "the shame, the not knowing, the embarrassment," which changed after her first year of study. Correspondingly, Natalie noted:

Just having the knowledge and knowing why my grandmother was the way she was and why they were so full of shame and growing up being Aboriginal wasn't anything cool when you were a kid we didn't acknowledge it and like I still have some relatives out west who refuse to get their status card and acknowledge it

because there is so much shame there but my sisters and I we're like very proud now.

This sense of pride in one's identity is certainly a foundation for emotional well-being.

Another topic that came up was that of being vulnerable. As noted earlier, both Angelica and Leigh talked about the ability to become vulnerable within the safe space of the courses. Charity also talked about the initial challenge of bringing emotion into the classroom. I shared this theme in the feedback circle, and Grandmother Shirley responded with the following:

If you allow yourself to come into your vulnerability that's when you start to come into your own power and it connects to that emotional intelligence or intellectual discovery and these things because vulnerability is really powerful it's not a sign of weakness but it is often misunderstood—within a safe space, vulnerability is the foundation for growth.

In response to Grandmother Shirley, Angelica expressed:

I think vulnerability is scary too. You have to let your comfort blanket down. It's hard to let people in, it's the scariest feeling because that's what we hold on to, and we don't want people to see us scared or to see those inner feelings because that's what we hide so well, and that's their little shell and I think the courses force you to come out of that shell and look at who you are and allow people to see who you are because then you'll change, then you'll grow as a person. I feel like I am doing that and as I get older I hope to continue that.

This emotional growth is evidence of the connection between Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and personal well-being.

Personal Well-Being

The connection between the participants' educational experiences and personal well-being is profound and has been expressed throughout several of the themes. Because personal well-being is foundational and draws attention to the power of an Indigenous women-centred curriculum as healing and transformative, it is important to express the connections again here.

The following three quotations showcase the personal transformations that some of the students described as they experienced a distinct shift in their personal well-being. For example, Angelica described this shift by expressing "I know where my passions lie and I feel better than I've ever felt and I know who I am.... I'm in a much better place than I was" As I noted in the subtheme "affirmations of cultural identity development" and the subtheme "finding purpose," Angelica described her passion for culture and community involvement and the connections this has had to her own personal development. Thus, Angelica's contribution attests to cultural identity, and the act of knowing oneself, as an integral component of personal well-being. Sabrina's experience also reaffirms the healing component that cultural programming has on personal well-being. Her words outlined in the Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy themes attest to her personal transformation as she described feeling more comfortable with herself than she ever had. Sabrina stated that her personal growth in relation to self-confidence and "feeling safe" with herself stemmed from her experiences in the Gidayaamin program and the cultural knowledge that she gained from the courses. The self-confidence that Sabrina noted is also reflected in Laura's comments that described her transformation as she was prompted to leave an abusive relationship and "start [her] life over." Thus, for

Laura the courses offered more than personal and cultural enrichment as she found seeds of empowerment and the strength to put her personal well-being and safety first.

The following comments attest to the healing component of the courses that nurtured “a healthy strong identity.” As noted in the Cultural Identity subtheme, Sabrina expressed that the courses served as an opportunity for her to experience the strength that comes with cultural identity development and she expressed that she was the strongest she had ever been upon completion of the Gidayaamin program. Sabrina further described her development of a healthy strong identity by making personal connections with the “good mind” teachings presented within the courses:

When I was going to school I would get mad at a lot of things and I would laugh or lash at a lot of things, but now...I’m more responsible for what I’m saying. I also have a huge responsibility in that drum circle of how those women view me and how I’m to act. So, for a lot of those women it’s healing, coming here is healing, and I can’t be a negative person in front of them and that’s what these courses taught me was to be responsible for my actions and my words and to be with a good mind and live in a good way as much as I can for myself and my family and my community. (Sabrina)

For other students, the healthy strong identities expressed in the courses served as a support network that helped some of the women get through difficult challenges. As Shannon contended, the support network comprised not only her peers and course instructors, but also the course content itself:

I had a lot of stuff happen to me in that time that I was there personally, so I had a lot of challenges thrown at me and stuff I had to work through, and I wasn’t sure

that I was going to be able to do it or get through it. But I think that some of the stuff that I got out of it got me to that point, and if it wasn't for that support not just the support of the people in the class and the teachers but even just the content the stuff that I learned that helped me try to hold on to whatever was left of myself at that point, because I was at that point where I was broke and so I think it definitely impacted my holistic well-being because I was able to put myself back together and maintain while I was there, positively. (Shannon)

Angelica's description of personal transformation also provided further evidence of the personal well-being that was inspired by the courses. As noted in the Evidence of Personal Transformation subtheme, Angelica described her personal transformation in relation to the Gidayaamin program logo of a butterfly and the accompanying teachings about the lifecycle of the butterfly that were gifted with the logo. During the development of Gidayaamin, I met with the graphic designer who created the program logo to reflect the program vision. The designer was invited to share the teachings with Gidayaamin students as the logo and accompanying teachings were gifted to reflect their journeys. Upon describing her personal transformation, Angelica stated that the program changed her life and has given her a renewed sense of purpose. The personal transformation that Angelica described was mirrored by Sabrina's assertion, described above, that she felt the strongest she had ever felt in her life and had become safe with her own feelings after completing the courses. Moreover, both Sherry and Jessica noted that they had found their voices and were expressing their voice through activism, advocacy, and the publications of their work to end violence and bring healing to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

Personal well-being was also attributed to connections with spirituality and the land. These connections are apparent in medicine wheel teachings as well as the theory of Homeplace and Maternal Essence. For example, Laura noted that she better understood her connections to the land after completing the courses:

During these courses, we talked about the earth and spirituality, which always brings me to my camp up north. I have a better connection to my camp since [I took] the courses as they helped me understand why I love going to my camp so much. (Laura)

As Laura made this connection and articulated it throughout the course, I also witnessed her become more grounded within her Métis identity. Perhaps for Laura, connecting to her camp in a renewed way, in a sense, was her act of “coming home to spirit.”

Coming Home to Spirit

Earlier, I described an exchange between Sabrina and Grandmother Lorene that took place during the pilot study. Sabrina noted feeling safe within her own feelings and Grandmother Lorene described this as coming home to her spirit. Sabrina reflected on this conversation during the feedback circle and connected it to her experience in the women’s drum circle as well. She noted that singing in public was initially out of her comfort zone when she was tasked with the role of coordinating a drum group. She contended, “these women started coming and we started gathering and I started singing but it didn’t feel like it was me singing and what I can equate that to, is my spirit talking.”

Charity also connected the development of cultural identity to the connection of spirit. Angelica and Sherry also talked about the course content and literature as fuel for

the spirit fire. The following comment makes it evident that beyond the content and the literature, the women took away lessons to continue fostering their own personal well-being: “It did help me with identity but it did also help me spiritually in the sense that it fed my spirit and helped me to acknowledge how to feed my spirit” (Sherry).

Acknowledging the need to feed one’s spirit can also be connected to honouring oneself. Sabrina described her experience in the mothering course, and particularly with the scrapbook assignment, where she learned to honour herself as a mother and to be more forgiving with herself:

[The courses] also helped me stand in my truth of who I am, during this whole entire educational journey I had to take a really hard look at who I was and through this theory of identity formation because I came up with a pretty good idea of who I am but this helps me stay grounded in that and to know it’s okay I don’t have to be like a ...being me is okay.

The next subtheme, family well-being, provides evidence of the rippling effect of well-being moving from self to family.

Family Well-Being

Everything I learn, I always bring back to my family. (Natalie)

Family well-being was a significant topic that came up in the circles and was expressed in several ways. The women noted the lessons they passed on to their families and the connection between their own development of cultural identity and the subsequent effects this had on their children’s cultural engagement. Others also noted how the courses prompted family healing:

Everything that I learned in that class I had gone home and implemented in my family structure and that was exciting too because I was able to leave the class and talk to my children and my husband about what I learned in the class and then come up with a plan of how I was going to implement it in my family so I looked forward to coming to class because I was always learning something new and something useful to me and my family. (Sabrina)

Sabrina continued by explaining that “everything in [her] house is based on that Kim Anderson’s theory: resist, reclaim, construct, and act.” She noted that this theory allowed for a better line of communication with her children and she was able to apply it in many different contexts, especially with her eldest son who was entering highschool. For her, the theory was an opportunity for her and her children to reflect on their emotions, actions, behaviours, and consequences within a cultural perspective. Moreover, Sabrina noted appreciating the ability to apply the lessons she learned in class within a cultural and historical context and explain things in a “healthier way.” Much like Sabrina, many of the women noted passing along lessons they were learning in class to their families. For Charity and Jessica, it was about developing cultural identity and being able to share cultural teachings with their children. Laura noted how she encouraged her aunt to start learning about her cultural roots to bring healing. Shannon also talked about giving her daughter a sweetgrass and quill basket at her graduation and connected this to passing on cultural teachings:

Uncovering who I am and knowing where I came from and knowing where my roots are planted is so significant to me and it’s very important for me to be able

to raise my own children that way and give them those things and I gave my daughter a quill basket it's a quill and sweetgrass basket. (Shannon)

Shannon continued by noting that she didn't offer a lesson with the basket but looks forward to watching her daughter find those lessons herself.

Leigh also talked about how the course has helped her develop a stronger relationship with her daughter:

It made me feel so proud because I was able to take something that I had learned in university and share it with my daughter and have her being to think this way about herself and about her people and who she is as a being and how she can contribute to make it better so that really touched me and I wouldn't have had that without the course.

Leigh noted that she had passed on the book *Sweetgrass Basket* (Carvell, 2005) to her daughter and allowed her daughter to come to her own understandings of the book, which they talked about as she moved from chapter to chapter. Moreover, Sherry also noted that the healing she found within the Gidayaamin program has helped her in her relationship with her daughter.

Holistic Well-Being

The rippling effect of the program and the courses as a result of the women's cultural identity development was indeed felt beyond the students in the classroom. The previous subthemes have documented the women's journeys toward developing a strong cultural identity and sharing that identity with their families and children. Lessons were passed on to family and to community members, most notably the Niagara Women's drum group. It is evident that seeds were planted in the program, and the women have

taken those seeds and carried them in their own baskets and planted them along the path, fostering growth in others. Jessica described clearing this path within her own family:

I've already talked about how I didn't know who I was as an Indigenous woman or where I came from so that provided me with the stepping stones to kind of go down my own red road journey and anything that I do I pass down to my kids....

If I'm able to pass down the information that I learn to my children that's a start for me because I didn't get that opportunity so if I'm able to pass down that information to them.... I'm starting to carry it on. And I hope that they do the same thing later in their life. (Jessica)

Many of the women expressed strong beliefs in the program and the healing it brought to them and their families (as expressed earlier), and they shared this belief with others in their communities. Thus, the women who had taken the Gidayaamin program encouraged their family members and others in the community to take the program. This is evident in the following comment by Shannon: "With recruitment we're all involved—especially if you realize that someone could benefit from the kind of experience that you had, which might have been similar or different." Extending this sentiment, Sherry noted, "There's no financial incentive for us, it's more about getting people to the place that we are and having that same awakening, it's something that we promote because we believe in it."

This belief in the courses or the overall program is expressed in the following two comments that present the connection between personal and community well-being:

As far as the cultural identity and the empowerment, I think the courses hit the nail right on the head—I'm pretty sure a lot of people in this group feel the same

way—and I've heard from other people who have gone through the program on the development of their cultural being. (Shannon)

I've seen other women come through the courses and the program and have taken on like a sense of their own well-being, which has had a rippling effect on to the work that they're doing in the community. (Leigh)

As Leigh further expressed, the establishment of the Niagara Native Women's drum group provides evidence of the rippling effect of well-being:

Now there's a women's drum group happening in Fort Erie and that's because of the work that one of the women has done through this program and she says that the program helped her to elevate herself to help heal herself that she's able to look at life in a different view and be able to contribute and to want to help other women and want to help other people in the community to have that good life and that connection to spirit and that love of self. That speak volumes because you have one woman who was affected by this program and is now affecting the lives of 20–30 women every week and that is helping them to reconnect to spirit and those women are mothers and aunties and granddaughters and grandmothers so now not only has the program had an effect on one person but it is affecting the lives of many and a very large amount because those women in that drum circle are now going to continue on that journey of healing through the connections that they're getting with the drum and then their children and their grandchildren. It's just beautiful it's amazing.

The Niagara women's drum group showcases holistic well-being through community healing. The group has brought a lot of women together and is not only healing for those in the circle but also those surrounding the circle.

This circle has brought much healing to the women in the community, but it is also important to think about men and this is a topic that also came up in the circle. Although Indigenous men's healing is beyond the scope of this study, there is a connection between reclaiming Indigenous women's identities with reclaiming the traditional roles of women and men, and thus, restoring the balance within Indigenous communities, which is discussed in the next subtheme.

Community safety and community dysfunction are other issues that came up during the sharing circles. It is important to make note of them in the holistic well-being section to provide insights into the reality of dysfunction that is common within Indigenous settings. I noted earlier that Sherry had been faced with this and it resulted in her not participating in community organizations; however, upon learning about her roles as an Indigenous woman she used her knowledge to contribute to community well-being and this prompted her participation in the organizations. Sabrina's vision of "bringing the holistic back to [the] community" promotes community safety and aims to reduce community dysfunction as the work she is doing in the community seeks to restore knowledge about traditional roles and responsibilities. Moreover, community dysfunction must be understood within the context of colonial trauma, thus opportunities to decolonize thought processes are integral to community healing and well-being. Angelica described her experience with community dysfunction in one organization and noted that she has used her knowledge to redirect her coworkers:

For Indigenous family and community well-being, we learn a lot of colonization, assimilation and genocide of our people, culture beliefs and values; however, we don't talk amongst our courses about lateral violence and I think that is huge...I see it a lot within our friendship centres and among our organizations. There's still this tension and this separation amongst our people and we're not working together and it's a lot of this talking behind each other's back and were not coming together in a sharing circle like this...I feel like we still have so much healing to do so that's kind of how I'm implementing my understanding of Indigenous knowledge. I know that our community well-being is so important and I talk about lateral violence. I talk about it with my co-workers because we need to come together and I try to redirect them.

As she noted, however, she would like to see lessons on lateral violence incorporated into the curriculum. Such lessons would help to restore balance within Indigenous communities.

Restoring the Balance

Restoring the balance was another topic that arose during the sharing circles. Several of the women noted that because the programming and courses are so women centred the “women are becoming empowered but our men are not quite there” (Shannon). Sabrina extended this sentiment: “As a community we need to be more cognizant of it and think of ways to empower our men because that's what they need to.” Charity agreed that it was important for men to have opportunities to understand their roles as Indigenous men in our community. Angelica agreed, noting “there's been so much pain and suffering and men need that same safe space to work through it—it is

really important to try and encourage men to take the program it has done so much for the women.”

Grandmother Shirley contributed to this conversation by pointing out the need to restore the balance in our communities by supporting Indigenous men’s identities as well. Drawing on the teachings of Mohawk Elder Jan Longboat, she noted:

It’s so simple: the men took care of the women, the women took care of the men, and they both took care of the children. So, it’s really critical that there are programs like this for our men too because as time has gone on and we’ve moved into this “civilized” culture, a lot of their roles are gone. Aren’t they? The hunting and so on. Women are still bringing life into this world and even if they don’t, women are home to a different degree in this day and age [but] the men are really lacking [cultural roles]. (Grandmother Shirley)

Grandmother Shirley highlighted the importance of Indigenous men’s literature as well. She made note of the work of Joseph Boyden and Richard Wagamese and articulated that bringing this material into the curriculum will help to restore the traditional balance among men and women within Indigenous communities.

The Seeds Have Been Planted

The women’s journeys of homecoming (B. Brant, 1997) have indeed involved carrying the baskets home and planting seeds of renewal. The women have worked within the framework of cultural identity to bring well-being home to their families and give back to their communities through involvement, advocacy, and activism. By finding voice, the women have also prompted reconciliation by educating non-Indigenous students and colleagues. As the women have journeyed forward towards paths of

decolonization and reclamation, they have contributed to community well-being and encouraged healing and wellness through renewed links merging education and Indigenous community. Thus, the connection between cultural identity development and personal well-being has had a rippling effect on the well-being of their families and communities. In this way, the women are truly contributing to the work of restoring the balance within themselves, their families, and their communities.

THE GIVEAWAY: LESSONS OF THE SWEETGRASS BASKETS

“Ooooooh, my basket, my beautiful basket,”

She says as she drops onto the bed next to me.

“Sarah, you have my basket,” she tells me as though I do not know.

So many weeks ago, when we were packing

The few things we could bring to school,

I saw Mattie looking longingly at her basket,

Setting it on the table with the items we wanted to take

Until Father came in to check our progress and shook his head

And said no, there was no need to take her basket.

And when he left the room, Mattie’s shoulders shook,

And even though she made no sound,

I heard the tears in her heart.

“Father let me bring my scarf,” I tell her.

“He should have let you bring your basket.”

And I find myself smiling smugly,

knowing Father has likely not noticed that

Mattie’s basket is missing from the table beside our bed,

Knowing I have taken Mattie’s sadness

And I lifted it from her heart.

As my sister sits beside me on this bed that is not our bed,

In this place that is not our home,

Her shoulders begin to shake,

And even though she makes no sound,

I hear the tears of joy in her heart. (Carvell, 2005, pp. 107–108)

On December 27, 2009, I had no idea what the book I found in a gift shop on my grandfather's home territory would come to mean to me. I was visiting my family on the Tyendinaga Mohawk reserve in Deseronto, Ontario, when I picked up the book *Sweetgrass Basket* (Carvell, 2005) in a community gift shop. With my aunt and cousins there to help keep my young boys entertained, I decided to take some time for myself to relax and read the book. I sat in my aunt's rocking chair while my boys played with my younger cousins. Reading the book brought me closer to my grandmother who attended residential school at the "mush hole" in Brantford, Ontario. I never had an opportunity to talk to my grandmother about her days in the residential school and I'm not sure she would have wanted to share those stories with me, but somehow in reading *Sweetgrass Basket* I felt a deeper understanding and appreciation for her experiences and the strength she exuded as a survivor. It was with both sadness and love in my heart that I read the book. Reflections on the story of my own grandmother's experiences, not talked about in my family, were found in the pages of the book. Reading the book offered me a feeling of "coming home." Because the book brought out so much emotion in me, and a deep sense of healing, as I came to terms with some of the fractured relationships in my own family, understood as the effects of intergenerational trauma, I knew it was perfect for the upcoming course I would be teaching the following spring. It was not until I conducted these research sharing circles, however, that I understood how much this book meant for the students as well.

The title for this interchapter “The Giveaway: Lessons of the Sweetgrass Baskets” is intended to reflect the gift of the book, and the giveaway of the book (i.e., a cultural understanding of the reciprocal relationship of giving and receiving). I have come to understand the process of the giveaway as one where we are passing our lessons and gifts forward to promote the well-being of our communities. For example, when people make their first hand drum they are expected to gift it to someone else and pass on the teachings that were learned in the process of making the drum. Beth Brant extends the tradition of the giveaway to Indigenous women’s literature:

I look on Native women’s writing as a gift, a give-away of the truest meaning. Our spirit, our sweat, our tears, our laughter, our love, our anger, our bodies are distilled into words that we bead together to make power. Not power over anything. Power. Power that speaks to hearts as well as to minds. (B. Brant, 1994, p. 8)

I began to understand the meaning the book *Sweetgrass Basket* had for the women during the three sharing circles as several of the women talked about how they have passed the book on to others. This passing on of the book can also be understood as an extension of the giveaway B. Brant describes above as women found power in the book and extended that power “to speak to the hearts and minds” of others. Leigh explained that she had passed the book on to her daughter and they had discussions on the meaning of the book that led to deeper discussions about the ways residential schools have affected Indigenous families. As Leigh noted, the book is an easy read so it can reach the hearts and minds of youth and get them to start thinking critically about the larger colonial context. Furthermore, Sharon noted, “I’m still connected with a lot of teachers

from where I'm from and I passed on *Sweetgrass Basket*, it's part of the curriculum for Grade 9 literature now."

Because *Sweetgrass Basket* was expressed as a meaningful book for the participants, I wanted to explore this further in the feedback circle and I thought it could be a useful metaphor to gather information about ways to improve the course delivery so that it better responds to the educational desires of Indigenous women in relation to cultural identity development and holistic well-being. To gather this information, I talked about the importance of sweetgrass as noted earlier and asked them what would be needed in their sweetgrass baskets to enhance their educational experiences. Sabrina was the first to respond:

I tried so hard not to get emotional when you were talking about the sweetgrass. I had the opportunity while I was going through your program to get on the board at [a community organization]. I was really thankful for being there because there were a lot of people on that board who I respected and admired and the one gentleman said that they were grooming me—they would give me the faith and the trust to go to meetings with government officials to negotiate things on behalf of the organization—and I really had the opportunity to learn a lot. When the position came up here for employment and training I was really sad because I had to leave the board position in order to accept [my current position]. And upon my departure they gave me a sweetgrass basket and I cried like a lunatic, I cried so hard, it was so emotional for me, and I was like I read this book and they were like "what's wrong we thought it was a nice gift" and I was like "I know, I love it but I read this book in my class and this basket means so much more to me." I'm

getting emotional now. It meant more to me than they knew, and that basket is the most prized possession in my house—not the PS3 not anything and like there’s nothing physical in it but there’s lot in it from me—all the stuff I learned at school all the stuff I learned in the community, it’s all wrapped up in that basket. They could have given me any gift in the world but for whatever reason they chose a sweetgrass basket.

As Sabrina noted, the sweetgrass basket she had received from her board colleagues is the most prized possession she has in her house. In a sense, it serves as a metaphor for carrying her experiences in the program and all of the lessons she has learned and passed down to her children.

Shannon also expressed a deep connection with a sweetgrass basket, noting that she gave her daughter a sweetgrass and quill basket at her graduation:

I gave that to her when she graduated high school and she’s coming into this program in September and I relate to that too. I came through the program and then here’s my daughter who’s struggled in the past year and I think she’s trying to find exactly where her feet need to land and I think this is going to be an incredible opportunity for her, but that basket, reading that book and being able to relate to what that meant, I gave that to my daughter and I didn’t give her any story or nothing to it, I just gave that to her and I want her to able to discover and see where she takes it. I’m going to do the same thing with my other daughter who graduates this year.

The above contributions make it evident *Sweetgrass Basket* was deeply meaningful for the women as they found personal connections within the story and the

mother–daughter relationship of the characters. I believe the sweetgrass basket has come to symbolize the strength and resilience the women found within Indigenous women’s literature and the courses as a whole, and have expressed throughout their educational journeys. Thus, I shared the idea of the sweetgrass basket with them as a metaphor for carrying these lessons forward as they continue to journey in education and community engagement and pass those lessons on to their families and communities. With this understanding, as the women recognize and carry their experiences in their baskets, they also carry strength and resilience. Laura expressed the above act of carrying all experiences forward:

When I read the book, it made me think about...all of my experiences that I’ve had over the years, I’ve had a lot of trauma, I’ve had a lot of happy times and it all goes in there and you carry it with you no matter what because you draw from your experience to how you react now and what you do now and that’s very powerful.

Angelica expressed this sentiment in the following comment:

Everything we’ve went through in our lives the trials and the tribulations are all in that basket and we wouldn’t change that it makes us who we are—that basket goes everywhere with us. It has all those memories, all those experiences, everything, who we are is in that basket.

Charity also extended this understanding of the sweetgrass basket:

I think there’s a lot of metaphors that go along with the sweetgrass basket just even the way the sweetgrass grows right that individuality and then all coming together. That’s where your strength comes from and then the process of making

that basket and then bringing that with you and accepting everything that you went through while you were growing and that's part of that basket. So, I think there's a lot of metaphors that goes into that so it leaves it open for everybody to take from it and carry it how they want to.

Charity's comment captured the essence of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy that allowed students to find meaning and carry forward the lessons that apply to them and use them for whatever they need, whether it involves developing a sense of cultural identity, understanding contemporary Indigenous issues, finding healing in the stories, or some other connection. Throughout the sharing circles, it was evident that everyone finds something different within the lessons and the stories that they now carry in their own sweetgrass baskets.

As expressed throughout other themes, the women carried different lessons with them. For Angelica, it was revisiting her journals and being impressed with her own reflections. This prompted her to discover her own intellectual strengths. For Sabrina, it was carrying the scrapbook with her everywhere and continually looking back on it and sharing it with others. This brought her healing and prompted her to feel safe with her own feelings and gentler with herself. Sherry also noted carrying a poem she had written in one of the courses with her and, as she noted, she has now shared this poem at a training session for Indigenous women leaving correction facilities. Thus, the coursework prompted Sherry to find her strengths as a community educator. This is further expressed in the following:

With my traditional introduction, I consider that as something in my toolbox because now with my clients and my work...I taught them how to say their name

and when we started doing groups they began to introduce themselves in the language and they never had done that before. If I hadn't learned that in the program I wouldn't have been able to pass that on to them. (Sherry)

Beyond students in the classroom, lessons have been applied to others as the women passed readings, teachings, and healing energy on to family members and community members, such as the women in the drum group. Seeds were planted in the program and throughout the courses. The women have taken those seeds, carried them in their own baskets, and planted them along the path to foster growth for others.

As noted earlier, to better respond to the question that looked at improving Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, I asked the women what else they think could have been added in their sweetgrass baskets that would have fostered their experiences throughout the courses. In response, the women noted that lessons about self-care and self-expression would be valuable. For Sabrina, this was especially important as she noted her tendency to give so much of herself to community and continually put herself last:

I have no idea how to take care of myself, I know how to take care of my family, my community, my husband and I know how to take care of everybody else but I have no idea how to do that for me, and logically, take time off and go to the spa or go have a coffee, I know those things but actually getting me to do those things is impossible so maybe as part of that mothering course some practical self-care component.

Shannon also drew attention to the importance of a self-care component for Indigenous women:

I think as women in general, self-care is always the thing that's *the last thing*, it's not just getting your nails or hair done, there's other means of self-care that we don't look at. It's hard especially when you're working for your family and your community.

Angelica suggested that a self-care component could easily be connected with medicine wheel teachings that are already incorporated into the courses and also suggested having workshops such as beadwork sessions. As she noted, such workshops would connect with cultural teachings but serve as a break from academic work.

The other suggestion for improvement was to incorporate some lessons on self-expression. This is especially important, as several of the women articulated, because we discuss emotionally charged topics. Although the courses are delivered in a safe space, lessons about self-expression would also help the women as they continue on to other courses and work experiences. As Angelica noted:

I feel like I'm still working on the self-expression and the emotional intelligence because I'm a really passionate person and I was really shy growing up so taking the Gidayaamin so it helped me to be able to voice my opinion and even talk about these issues, when I'm passionate about it something it sounds like I'm angry like it comes off like I'm angry. I can't even organize my thoughts and articulate it properly. I just come across as this angry person, and people are like "oh there she goes again." It's just really hard especially talking about Native issues my heart is there and I know so much but I can't get it out in an intelligent way—because I have so much stirred up in here and I feel it and my heart races and how do I manage that and I'm still working on that. I'm going into my third

year and I haven't conquered that yet so I just have to stay aware and hopefully catch myself and start over again and if I have to stop and take a few steps back then that's what I have to do because I can't be yelling at my clients one day.

These suggestions for improvement offer pedagogical lessons that I will carry in my own sweetgrass basket. I am honoured to carry a basket that is full of so many powerful lessons from the students. I learn so much from the students and understand this as part of the reciprocal exchange embedded in Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. This can also be understood as a giveaway as I have been gifted with so many lessons.

To close the feedback circle, Grandmother Shirley presented the participants and me with gifts of sweetgrass from a long, finely braided roll. As she cut each of us a piece, she shared a teaching of where that braid of sweetgrass came from and the memory, strength, and resilience it holds. This gift serves as a profound example of the Maternal Essence that we carry in our baskets as we continue to travel the "sweetgrass road." I am sure that all of the women will cherish the gift of sweetgrass as they continue to give and receive cultural lessons and affirmations along the "sweetgrass road."

I will end this interchapter by sharing a reflection that has personally affirmed the importance of this research and my journey through the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. On July 20, 2016, I attended the Niagara Women's drumming circle (Strong Water Women: *Zhoonge Niibii Kwe*) for the first time. Sabrina has been instrumental in sharing her gifts with other Indigenous women in the community by bringing this drum group together. Although the women's singing group has been going strong for over a year now and they have been invited to sing for numerous events including the Canadian Federation of University Women national conference at Brock University, I have had few

opportunities to attend because of my own schedule with my children's lacrosse and other extra-curricular activities. On July 20th, however, when I realized there was no lacrosse and my oldest son was visiting a friend, I felt that my own spirit fire was burning low, so I decided to make my way down to the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre. My mom agreed to watch my youngest son so I could attend. I arrived just before they were about to sing my favourite song. They welcomed me and said I got there just in time because the next song was Horse Giveaway. I received this as an affirmation that I was meant to be there that evening. We also sang the Spirit Fire song, which reminds us of self-care and the need to honour our own spirit fire before we can help others. This was another important reminder for me. The night ended with final words to close the full moon ceremony and Sabrina noted how happy she was that I had attended that night and she told the group that the Gidayaamin program was her driving force behind starting the drum group and that energy and the healing within that circle was a result of her healing in the Gidayaamin program. Listening to Sabrina share those words with all the women who attended, including some incoming Gidayaamin students who she had urged to take the program, really touched my heart. As Sabrina stated, the evidence of the power of the program exists within the circle. For me, this was a strong declaration of the connection between the courses and holistic well-being. Sabrina shares her personal transformation with the community and has used her experience to touch the lives of other women in that circle. She continues to encourage new women to participate in the circle and it has become a strong and powerful circle of women whose voices have now touched the lives of our community as well as the non-Aboriginal community. As I write this chapter, the Strong Water Women: Zhoonge Niibii Kwe singers have just come home from Toronto

where they have made national news by singing at the Sixties Scoop Rally outside Osgoode Hall in Toronto, Ontario (Bochsler, 2016). Their voices are becoming stronger, the women are becoming empowered, and Sabrina, the founder of the drum group, has indeed worked hard to bring “the holistic back to [the] community.”

CHAPTER 7: SWEETGRASS IS ALL AROUND HER

Since Sky Woman, millions and millions of Indigenous women have inherited her legacy. As Indigenous women, we have been resourceful, resilient and remarkable in our will to keep falling and moving forward. We fall to better ground because of the many women who have gone before us, breaking our fall, and inspiring us from the shining example of their own incandescent lives.

—Sandra Laronde, *Sky Woman: Indigenous Women Who Have Shaped, Moved or Inspired Us*

The Haudenosaunee Creation Story is the starting point for my academic work and the courses I teach because it is well understood that, for Indigenous peoples, our way of life begins with creation as is reflected in our languages, ceremonies, and cultural protocols. The Creation Story provides the original lessons that are all around us today. These lessons must be embedded within Indigenous pedagogies. Moreover, references to Sky Woman can be found throughout Indigenous Women's literature providing Maternal Essence as well as a site of Homeplace for Indigenous women who are all heirs to the maternal legacy that Sky Woman has left for us. The teachings of Sky Woman shape understandings of empowered Indigenous womanhood that inform Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and this is therefore a necessary place to begin this chapter. The sweetgrass lessons come from the original lessons of the Haudenosaunee Creation Story. Throughout this collective journey toward the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, I came to understand the importance of the sweetgrass lessons that grew "all around," affirming the Maternal Essence that guided this study:

Sweetgrass grows and remains a link to remembering tradition. For many Aboriginal peoples, sweetgrass is the hair of Mother Earth; it provides clarity of mind and it purifies us. The threefold braid of sweetgrass represents the integration of body, mind and spirit; it is also symbolic of community strength. One strand of sweetgrass is easy to break, but many braided together are strong. (Laronde, 1996, p. 1)

As I explained earlier, this dissertation is an extension of my master's research and it is therefore necessary to pick up where I left off. I ended my master's thesis with the wise and powerful, yet simple, words of the Grandmother Elder who guided my master's research. She said, "Don't just let this sit on a shelf, use it and do something with it." A similar sentiment is expressed by Anzaldúa (1990) who wrote, "Change requires more than words on a page—it takes perseverance, creative ingenuity and acts of love" (p. 574). Resonating with the above words, Grandmother Shirley, who guided this research, made references throughout the sharing circles to the "fierce love" the participants expressed when they shared their stories and their creative acts of "perseverance." As she articulated, throughout their work as students, mothers, and community members, they were "feeding the buffalo" and providing sustenance for their families and communities. In doing so, the women were filling their sweetgrass baskets and carrying them home.

The act of taking a vision forward for the betterment of Indigenous families and communities is certainly an act of love, and all the participants continue to play a role in this vision being realized. As I noted in Chapter 1, it has been seven years since I completed my master's research and put forth the vision for culturally relevant

programming as expressed by the Indigenous women who participated in that earlier study. The Elder's direction to not "let this sit on a shelf" has encouraged me in my "own will to keep...moving forward" (Laronde, 2005, p. vii) and my master's research certainly did not just sit on a shelf. It evolved and served as the impetus for the development of the Gidayaamin program and it planted the initial pedagogical seeds for me to develop an Indigenous-women-centred pedagogy that informed the Gidayaamin program and all the courses I teach. Moreover, as I noted in Chapter 1, the work of Dr. Andrea O'Reilly with Demeter Press and the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement (MIRCI), and the space she has created for Indigenous women—especially scholars Jeanette Corbiere Lavell, Memee Lavell-Harvard, and Kim Anderson—within the field of motherhood studies has helped me to conceptualize and craft this understanding of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and of Indigenous Maternal Methodology. This is indeed an act of "creative ingenuity."

It is evident in the findings chapters that this work is multifaceted and multilayered, yet deeply interconnected. Thus, it is complex to describe. In a keynote at Brock University in 2014, Carl James drew attention to this complexity, noting that there are multiple identities and intersectionalities and that these identities are always changing. By using a metaphor of an onion and the peeling of multiple layers, he noted that there are also multiple cores and that these cores are different in different contexts. His description resonates with Latina/Latino critical theory (Delgado Bernal, 2002), which provides a strong gender analysis that acknowledges multidimensional identities and addresses the intersections of racism and sexism. Yosso (2005) also described the

above intersections as “layers of subordination based on immigration status, sexuality, culture, language, phenotype, accent, and surname” (p. 72).

Indigenous women’s identities must also be understood as multidimensional within the context of varying colonial and de-colonial experiences. As I outlined in Chapter 2, the layers of Indigenous identities are further complicated by political and legal definitions of status based on blood quantum, band or tribal membership, a sense of belonging in traditional societies and clan systems, and varying understandings and levels of acceptance for two-spiritedness. Identities are also complicated by geographical divisions such as living on reserve or off reserve and by “invisible boundaries” that politically separate Nations, such as the border between Canada and United States.

As Indigenous communities continue to decolonize understandings of identities, the cores of the very nationhood of Indigeneity is also continually changing. Thus, there is a need to acknowledge the multidimensional identities of Indigenous women (Anderson, 2007; Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere Lavell, 2006). Moreover, as noted in Chapter 2, Kiowa scholar Perry Horse (2005, 2012) also pointed out that Indigenous identity is multifaceted. He outlined the complexities associated with Indigenous identities by drawing attention to the following factors: ethnic nomenclature, racial attitudes, legal and political status, cultural change, and personal sensibility. Thus, the participant stories that I shared throughout are not intended to be representative of the experiences of all Indigenous women in university or of all Indigenous-centered programs.

By drawing attention to the common experience of colonization and racialization (St. Denis, 2007), my intention was to bring a harmonious description of the work that

must be done to carve out safe spaces for Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy that are inclusive for all learners and for Indigenous research and Indigenous scholars. Moreover, as I have carefully woven each strand of this research story together, my attempt is to honour the participants' voices and provide a holistic representation of the storied lives that have given shape to this study. Much like the Indigenous women's literature I present throughout my courses, this work moves through metaphor to the concrete, connects the spiritual to the physical realm, and extends theory to practice.

Summary of Research Findings

In the opening chapter of this dissertation I articulated that I had set out to explore the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. I expressed the resulting research story by carefully braiding the women's responses offered during the sharing circles and the feedback circle, and listening to the maternal lessons of the sweetgrass teachings that continuously emerged throughout this research process. Thus, the research story extends the metaphor of the sweetgrass basket to the women's experiences in my courses, which have informed my own pedagogical journey and this collective journey toward the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. By way of summary, I return to the three research questions that framed this journey.

Research Question 1

The first research question asked about process: *How did Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy honour and embrace Indigenous women's identities and roles as mothers, students, and community members?* As I have described, my teaching approach is based on a holistic model that embraces the identities of Indigenous women, including all components of self and roles such as student, mother, and community member (J. Brant,

2011). Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy is intended to honour the above roles in a myriad of ways by creating a safe Homeplace where Indigenous women and other students can be their authentic whole-selves and where their roles as mothers, students, and community members inform their educational experiences. I have positioned these identity roles as key strengths that enhance rather than hinder their success. The purpose of this question, then, was to assess how the women's identity roles have been honoured and embraced throughout their experiences in the course(s). Laura's response affirmed that for her not only were these roles honoured and embraced, but she became more connected to the meaning of them as a Métis woman. As she noted, the course provided "stepping stones" to her self-discovery as a Métis student, mother, and community member. Similarly, Leigh's response also affirmed a deeper connection to the above roles as an Indigenous woman after taking the course. She described her personal transformation by articulating that after taking the course she was more familiar with herself than she had ever been. Laura and Leigh's experiences provide evidence of a reciprocal relationship that naturally exists within Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. As I worked to ensure I honour the above identity roles and allow students to bring their whole-selves into the course(s), some of the women became more connected to their identities as mothers, students, and community members. For these students, their recognition of being (Anderson, 2000) involved becoming more familiar with their whole-selves.

Other participants noted that they extended the classroom lessons to family and community. Their contributions showcase the ways identity is linked and interconnected to the above roles that are fostered by Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. For example,

Jessica noted, “Now I can start applying that stuff in my home and with my kids and in my life and with my community” (Jessica). Other aspects of identity such as identifying as a student, mother, and community member are interconnected and crossed many of the themes in varying and overlapping ways.

Research Question 2

The second research question addressed outcomes: *How does Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy foster (a) cultural identity development, (b) holistic well-being, (c) academic success, and (d) community engagement?* As I sought to answer this question, I found that *holistic well-being* had a reciprocal relationship with the other three concepts. For example, a strong cultural identity fosters overall holistic well-being, and well-being further contributes to a healthy sense of cultural identity. The course material prompted cultural identity development and was emotional and personal for many of the students. Academic work, within the maternal and cultural context of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy prompted emotional work that led to a deeper awareness of self and the roles associated with Indigenous womanhood as noted above. Cultural identity development and the nurturing of self went hand in hand as maternal cultural teachings present lessons on the balance of the physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual along with other women’s ceremonies. These lessons fostered personal well-being, which extended to family and community well-being and rippled back to personal well-being (A. Wilson, 2004). For example, the women applied lessons they learned in the classroom at home and in the community. As others benefited from these lessons, they worked to create family and community healing and wellness, which further supported the women’s well-being. The women’s drum group is a profound example of the rippling effect described

by A. Wilson (2004). Sabrina who brought her lessons to the community by establishing a women's drum group also benefits from the nurturing environment that takes place within the drum circle.

Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy allowed many of the participants to come to terms with the effects of colonization and intergenerational traumas as well as develop an appreciation for the contemporary realities of Indigenous women, families, and communities. Lessons were informed by the women's experiences and embedded as part of the curriculum, which was empowering for other students. The learning exchange that took place in the classroom when students shared personal experiences and personal connections with the literature was noted by the women as a healing component of the courses because it prompted a sharing circle environment. Within this environment, some participants found their voices, and others felt safe expressing their voices.

The rippling effect of the program and the courses, as a result of the women's *cultural identity development*, was indeed felt beyond the students in the classroom. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 documented the women's journeys toward developing strong cultural identities and sharing that learning with their families and children and with their Indigenous communities. Lessons were passed on to family, children, and community members, most notably the Niagara Women's Drum group. It is evident that seeds were planted in the program, and the women have taken those seeds and carried them in their own baskets and planted them along the path, fostering growth in others. Sabrina who co-founded the drum group articulated, "What these courses taught me was to be responsible for my actions and my words and to be with a good mind and live in a good way as much as I can for myself, my family, and my community" and she expressed how she holds

these values in her role as an Indigenous woman, mother, and community member and shares these values with the women in the drum group and other community circles.

It was evident that the participants' visions of *academic success* were holistic and moved beyond academic to personal growth, and beyond personal growth to community well-being. Moreover, the women's contributions attest to their visions of a rippling effect of a holistic understanding of academic success. This is not an individual desire but rather one that involves providing sustenance for a larger community, much like the teachings of the buffalo. For example, many of the participants reported that they had encouraged family and community members to take the program or courses because they knew and experienced the value themselves and wanted to extend that to their families and communities. This was affirmed during the feedback circle when Sherry noted, "It's something that we promote because we believe in it" and Shannon added, "especially if you realize that someone could benefit from the kind of experience that you had."

Community engagement was expressed by all of the participants who have worked to contribute to community well-being in different ways through involvement, advocacy, and activism. As I noted in the interchapter, *The Giveaway: Lessons of the Sweetgrass Baskets*, in addition to the three participants who were already involved in some form of activism or community advocacy, the other women were all inspired to get involved in their communities and engage in activism or advocacy work after taking the courses. For some, the courses were a pathway to feeling comfortable enough to become involved in community engagement and, for others, the awareness of social justice issues inspired them to work for awareness and change. In this way, the participants indeed are

part of a collective giveaway where the medicines are implemented and seeds that contribute to and nourish community well-being are planted.

Research Question 3

The third research question looked to the future: *What improvements can be made to the delivery of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy?* With this final research question, I sought to explore what improvements could be made to better align the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy with the educational needs, desires, and visions of Indigenous women. One participant noted the importance of balancing the “damage central” lessons with more comfortable material. As I noted in Chapter 6, there is a need for students to move out of their comfort zones because “stepping outside of one’s comfort zone can serve as a catalyst for engaging in constructive critical dialogue” (Monchalin, 2016, p. xxv); however, Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy must also attend to the healing that must take place when faced with difficult material. I elaborate on “uncomfortable material” later in this chapter as this is an important part of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. The need to balance may come from lessons on Indigenous women’s self-care, which was another suggestion for improvement. The final suggestion was to include lessons on effective ways to express emotion. These suggestions offer valuable insights that are now carried in my own sweetgrass basket and I will attend to them as I continue to create a space for Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy.

The following comment expressed by Charity during the feedback circle eloquently captures the essence of the collective research story and the metaphor of the sweetgrass baskets:

I think there's a lot of metaphors that go along with the sweetgrass basket just even the way the sweetgrass grows right that individuality and then all coming together. That's where your strength comes from and then the process of making that basket and then bringing that with you and accepting everything that you went through while you were growing and that's part of that basket. So, I think there are a lot of metaphors that go into that so it leaves it open for everybody to take from it and carry it how they want to.

As Charity's comment demonstrates, Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy can be adapted to attend to all students in varying ways. It draws from the life experiences and cultural strengths of Indigenous women and positions these experiences as key assets to a holistic learning engagement that can be empowering for all learners.

Carrying the Lessons Forward

Aligning with my spiritual beliefs and the Maternal Essence that I described as one strand of the theoretical framework that shapes my teaching praxis (see Chapter 2), my understanding of this work coming to fruition is that of "flowering growth." Many lessons came to me at the right time, affirming my praxis. These lessons are the medicines that I now carry forward in my own sweetgrass basket. A general sentiment that is common within Indigenous worldviews is that there are no coincidences and I wholeheartedly believe that my "stumbling" across certain lessons was a result of the maternal energies that guided me throughout this work. Beth Brant (1997) writes about her ancestral guides as well as the idea of "flowering growth" by connecting Indigenous women's literature to community healing:

The amount of books and written material by Native people is relatively small. Yet, to us, these are precious treasures carefully nurtured by our communities. And the number of Native women who are writing and publishing is growing. Like all growing things, there is a need and desire to ensure the flowering of this growth. You see, these fruits feed our communities. These flowers give us survival tools. I would say Native women's writing is the Good Medicine that can heal us as a human people. (p. 9)

I extend this description to Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. For some of the women, the lessons they gathered from the courses, the literature included in the course, and the classroom conversations, have indeed fed their spirits and given them survival tools. In turn, they have fed the new buffalo by giving back to their families and communities and I showcase this phenomenon as the rippling effect of the holistic well-being associated with the women's cultural identity development.

The Three Links: Epistemology, Methodology, and Pedagogy

The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (hooks, 1994, p. 207)

As I work to connect theory to practice, to refine and craft my praxis of Indigenous Maternal Methodology and of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, I am

continually sorting through the lessons in my own sweetgrass basket. Many of the lessons in my basket are informed by the work of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars whose names fill my reference list, particularly those working within feminist praxis and anti-colonial frameworks (Anderson, 2000; Delgado Bernal, 2002; hooks, 2007; Kovach, 2009; Lavell-Harvard, 2011; St. Denis, 2007; Yosso, 2005). Their work has helped me to articulate “education as the practice of freedom” (hooks, 1994, p. 207) although I am well aware of the destructive force that education has been for Indigenous learners. To conceptualize the potential for education as the practice of freedom for Indigenous learners, I have reflected on the following words of Audre Lorde (1983):

Survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. (pp. 26–27)

Christopher Dunbar (2008) extended the above sentiment to articulate the need for Indigenous methodologies that transform the academy. I have considered the meaning of the above in terms of merging two worldviews within education and bringing in Indigenous tools to bring about genuine change. Thus, this work re-envisions, re-creates, and redefines what the tools are. Within this work, education as “the academy” can be considered the “master’s house” but education as the practice of freedom (hooks, 1994) has been redefined by recreating “the tools” through an Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy

and Methodology and gathering the tools, or rather the medicines, that are carried in our sweetgrass baskets. These medicines include Indigenous women's literature (poetry, narrative, and memoir), storytelling, and cultural teachings, and all are affirmed by Homeplace and Maternal Essence. These medicines are evident in the work of the identity theorists and critical race theorists who have informed this work.

Advancing Indigenous Maternal Methodology

In Chapter 3, I expressed my quest for an Indigenous research framework that would align with Indigenous research principles and best capture the collective research story to express the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. As I noted, I was unable to find a framework that I felt would effectively and authentically allow me to do this. I connected with Kovach (2009) who also drew attention to the lack of Indigenous research frameworks in academic literature. Prompted by Kovach's call to use Indigenous methods and publish them so they are available to other emerging Indigenous researchers, I articulated a research framework that was best suited to honour Indigenous research principles and meet my research goals. As I noted, I drew on Indigenous storytelling methodology (Fitznor, 2012; L. T. Smith, 1999) and critical race-gendered epistemologies (Delgado Bernal, 2002) to articulate the importance of and inform the development of Indigenous Maternal Methodology. This framework is guided by Maternal Essence and is closely aligned with Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. These methodological and pedagogical links are affirmed by Delgado Bernal (2002) who explained, "none of the three—epistemology, methodology, and pedagogy—can be isolated from one another, as they are closely interdependent and directly influence the research process" (p. 115). Kovach (2009) also drew attention to the interrelatedness of

Indigenous worldviews, methodology, and pedagogy. These very links bring meaning to her call for Indigenous research frameworks that transform the university landscape. As Anzaldúa (1990) articulated:

Theory, then, is a set of knowledges. Some of these knowledges have been kept from us—entry into some professions and academia denied to us. Because we are not allowed to enter discourse, because we are often disqualified and excluded from it, because what passes for theory these days is forbidden territory for us, it is vital that we occupy theorizing space, that we not allow white men and women to solely occupy it. By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform that theorizing space. (p. xxv. emphasis in original)

Delgado Bernal (2002) extended the work of Anzaldúa by describing the connections between methodological and pedagogical insights and highlighting the importance of “the braiding of theory, qualitative research strategies, and a sociopolitical consciousness” (p. 116). As noted by Delgado Bernal, the use of different pedagogical and methodological tools has the ability to gather stories and knowledges that are traditionally unheard. These unheard stories and community knowledges are indeed the stories that Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy presents through Indigenous women’s literatures, classroom dialogue that honours students’ voices, and Indigenous knowledge presented by Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous Maternal Methodology extends the classroom lessons by gathering stories and knowledges that in turn inform Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. The intention of this work is to advance the collective research story to transform the academic landscapes and continue clearing pathways for Indigenous epistemologies that honour the realities of Indigenous women.

As Grande (2008) wrote in her chapter, “Red Pedagogy: the Un-Methodology,” Red pedagogy is not presented as a method to be memorized, rather it serves as a space of engagement. Likewise, Indigenous Maternal Methodology is presented as a living methodology that is informed by the relationships with the Elder and the participants. As I outlined in Chapter 3, Indigenous Maternal Methodology is holistic in nature and informed by Indigenous women’s cultural teachings and traditional knowledge. These teachings are passed down intergenerationally, embedded within women-centred creation stories and Indigenous maternal histories (J. Brant, 2014a; Castellano, 2000; Steinhauer, 2002). Traditional knowledge is passed down from Indigenous Elders and also in dreams, visions, and blood memory (Castellano, 2000). Grandmother Shirley provided the maternal and cultural guidance to enact the proper space of engagement that was necessary for this research and my research participants and connected us to our maternal cultural teachings. These teachings will vary among nations, and proper protocols for engagement must be understood in accordance with local Indigenous knowledges. Thus, I present Indigenous Maternal Methodology as a space of engagement with the recommendation that scholars work with Elders and follow their own maternal teachings to advance their scholarship in ways that align and are consistent with their traditions.

Through Indigenous Maternal Methodology, and the relationship I established with Grandmother Shirley, I have not only conducted my research in a way that was most suitable for my participants, but also presented this approach as a contribution to the advancement of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in academia. I was guided by Maternal Essence and gifted with sweetgrass teachings that were gifts for me and for the participants and that, through this work, I gift back to the community. The spiritual

connections that emerged through this work are indeed a testament to the “sweetgrass that grows all around her” (B. Brant & Laronde, 1996) and an extension of the legacy of Sky Woman.

My Praxis—A Living Connection Between Theory and Practice

Ladson-Billings (1995) showcased her work that connected Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as a vehicle to promote a sense of cultural pride. Yosso (2005) extended this work by drawing attention to community cultural wealth and highlighting the importance of honouring the knowledge of students and their communities as key assets within the learning environment. This is embedded in the strength-based approach of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy that I outlined in Chapter 1, which recognizes the cultural knowledge, resilience, and lived experiences that students bring to the classroom as well as the importance of connecting students to community knowledge (J. Brant, 2011). Juxtaposing these theoretical models with the work of Kim Anderson (2000) on cultural identity development and Lavell-Harvard (2011) on transformational resistance brings a unique Indigenous understanding of education as the practice of freedom by reconnecting Indigenous students with their community cultural wealth.

In Chapter 1, I stated that I would return to the following question by Horse who advised that a “sense of Indianness is rooted in the past,” and articulated the need for students to engage in several “stages of consciousness” (p. 109), including racial, political, linguistic, and cultural consciousness. He asked, “What is it that helps us navigate comfortably through this techno-multicultural world while retaining essential aspects of our ‘Indianness?’” (p. 109). By drawing on Yosso’s work on community cultural wealth along with Anderson’s (2000) work on identity formation theory that

takes Indigenous women through four stages that prompt the contemporary application of Indigenous womanhood, I propose that Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy serves as a model for promoting multiple stages of consciousness and conceptualizing Indigenous women's contemporary identities as assets to one's educational journey. Transformational resistance (Lavell-Harvard, 2011) deepens a critical consciousness as Indigenous students understand the root of social inequities and begin to understand education as a vehicle for social change. These stages of consciousness involve naming the forces of oppression that have attempted "our cultural annihilation" (B. Brant, 1994, p. 18). Yosso (2005) expressed how naming these forces can lead to empowered participation:

When the ideology of racism is examined and racist injuries are named, victims of racism can often find their voice. Those injured by racism and other forms of oppression discover that they are not alone and moreover are part of a legacy of resistance to racism and the layers of racialized oppression. They become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed and learning to make arguments to defend themselves. (p. 75).

Indeed, the women have found their voices and have even become empowered participants not only in the classroom but also beyond as they have expressed their voices by defending or calling attention to Indigenous issues at public forums, or even in written publications. Yosso's statement about finding voice characterizes Jessica's experience. Her words, also noted in Chapter 5, are testament to the process of becoming an "empowered participant." As Jessica noted, prior to the courses, she was afraid to talk to people, but this changed as she progressed through the program:

I was very shy when I started the program and throughout and maybe the second month I was in the program it was like an awakening you couldn't shut me up and that's something I learned, not to suppress yourself and your voice.

Jessica's journey has taken her from "not being able to speak in class" to presenting at, and organizing, events on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's and Girls in Canada. Now, as a published author (Riel-Johns, 2016) who has written a chapter for the collection *Forever Loved: Exposing the Hidden Crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada* (Lavell-Harvard & J. Brant, 2016), Jessica has indeed become an empowered participant. Other participants such as Angelica pointed out the desire to learn how to effectively express their knowledge of the inequities and social injustices faced by Indigenous communities. As Angelica's comments demonstrate, because social injustices are deeply intertwined with the traumas Indigenous peoples witness in their own families and communities, Indigenous students can find it difficult to talk about some of the injustices without getting emotional or angry. Although the emotions may bring a deeper level of dialogue to the classroom, Angelica expressed the desire to learn how to effectively communicate about these issues without getting emotional or angry. Her comments complicate Lavell-Harvard's (2011) work on Indigenous women's transformational resistance and attest to the need for a safe Homeplace for emotional dialogue that provides a balance of the cultural lessons on self-care that the participants described as desirable in the feedback circle.

Yosso (2005) described the role of culture through a Critical Race Theory lens and noted that "the cultures of Students of Color can nurture and empower" and "culture can form and draw from communal *funds of knowledge*" (p. 76). Yosso's work resonates

with Kim Anderson's theory of identity formation as I have applied it in this study and considered the value of Indigenous women-centred curriculum. For many Indigenous students, however, a communal fund of knowledge may not be as accessible as it is for others as a result of the extent to which colonial influence has affected Indigenous communities. As the students come to understand this through the lens of colonial trauma, however, they become empowered participants through transformational resistance by reclaiming what has been lost and constructing new ways of community engagement. For example, traditional knowledge and opportunities for cultural identity development are found by re-connecting Indigenous students with a communal fund of knowledge that nurtures and empowers. For participants such as Jessica and Sherry who have both presented and published their work, the safe Homeplace for this was within the classroom environment and other academic fora. Other participants, such as Sabrina, became "empowered participants" (Yosso, 2005, p. 75) by forming communal funds of knowledge that promoted the healing and well-being of other community members. For example, I noted in Chapter 6 that Sabrina founded a women's singing and drumming group that can be understood as a communal fund of knowledge that has nurtured and empowered other women who are part of the drum circle. An integral part of the drum circle is the passing on of teachings, specifically the protocols and responsibilities of the drum circle and the songs, and also of "walking the talk" as Sabrina expressed:

I also have a huge responsibility in that drum circle of how those women view me and how I'm to act. So, for a lot of those women it's healing, coming here is healing, and I can't be a negative person in front of them and that's what these courses taught me was to be responsible for my actions and my words and to be

with a good mind and live in a good way as much as I can for myself and my family and my community.

Moreover, the women in the circle are also becoming nurtured and empowered by reclaiming the traditions of drumming and singing for community healing.

As this work helps Indigenous students to “form and draw from communal funds of knowledge,” (Yosso, 2005, p. 76), it is important to remember the multiple identities of learners and the multiple realities and experiences that are brought into the individual and collective educational experience of Indigenous learners. As Charity eloquently expressed:

There’s a lot of metaphors that go along with the sweetgrass basket just even the way the sweetgrass grows right that individuality and then all coming together that’s where your strength comes from and then the process of making that basket and then bringing that with you and accepting everything that you went through while you were growing and that’s part of that basket so I think there’s a lot of metaphors that goes into that so it leaves it open for everybody to take from it and carry it how they want to.

As all the students came to the classes with different experiences and took different lessons that they have placed in their baskets, this research must be understood within the context of their experiences. That being said, it is an open model that can be adapted and draw from the cultural strengths that many other students might bring with them as they contribute to the “communal funds of knowledge” that will nurture and empower. This work then is meant to be understood as inclusive work that opens the hearts and minds of learners and educators to the complexities of all Indigenous

identities. It is important to note that while we continue “digging up medicines” that suit our particular needs, Anderson (2011) has urged us to “keep digging as there is so much to learn” (p. 161). As we keep digging, we will keep filling those baskets and continue to contribute to the development of stronger empowered communities.

Connecting With Other Empowered Communities

My own sweetgrass basket continues to be informed by the work of other scholars, particularly those who bring emancipatory literatures into their classrooms. The following words by Angelique V. Nixon (2014) who specializes in Caribbean and African diaspora literatures speaks to the power of literature that can be applied within educational settings to “move” learners to action and inspire empowered participation:

My feminist praxis and pedagogy is loaded with anger transformed into language and action as I use and remix the brilliance of Audre Lorde. I make my space— my classroom, my courses, my community activism and grassroots work, and my poetry— sites of resistance. I dance in the magic and fury of Audre Lorde, laughing with her and walking with spirit. Giving thanks. I am here. I have survived. Blessed with the guidance of ancestors. Creating, Teaching, Writing, Speaking, Doing. (para. 12)

Angelique describes the value of literature as an educational tool that inspires students to think about processes of oppression and the intersections of oppression that are deeply embedded throughout social and political structures. Thus, her application of literature in the classroom, specifically the work and poetry of Audre Lorde, promotes critical dialogue. Similar to the women in this study, Nixon (2014) expressed that the

poetry of Audre Lorde moved her to find her voice. In the following excerpt, she describes a deep connection with the poem “A Woman Speaks” by Audre Lorde:

The words in this poem have been my guiding force for many years as Audre Lorde’s poetry helped me to make sense of my life in profound ways. Her collection *The Black Unicorn* remains my torch and inspiration to be and become more. Yes, my voice matters, my survival matters, and I have a right to define and redefine myself. Audre Lorde has been my spirit/poet/intellectual guide and through studying her work, I have carved a place for myself in spaces never meant for me. (para. 1)

The sentiment evident in the above statement captures my experience when I first came across the work of the late Patricia Monture-Angus whose *Thunder in my Soul: A Mohawk Woman Speaks* (1995) was my first taste of Indigenous women’s writing. Although her book is a collection of her own academic essays, it opened my eyes to the world of Indigenous Women’s Literature where I have in many ways found myself, my Homeplace, and inspiration for my teaching praxis and this research. One of the participants in this study, Sabrina, was in my Reclaiming Indigenous Women’s Literature course when I passed around Lee Maracle’s (1996) *I am Woman: A Native Perspective on Feminism and Sociology*. Sabrina immediately purchased her own copy and has expressed a similar experience of finding herself, her voice, and the strength to use her voice after connecting with Lee Maracle’s book.

One tension I have felt within my own reflections on my teaching praxis is my desire to open the class to emotionally charged dialogue while ensuring a nurturing classroom environment. Nixon (2014) reaffirms my stance on the importance of this

dialogue. Her message about the necessity of difficult classroom conversations also resonates with the words of Morningstar Mercredi (2008) and Julie Kaomea who articulate the importance of uncomfortable dialogue for change. As Nixon expressed:

We need public language and new (our) voices to talk about issues of race, gender, class, sexuality, and other aspects of difference. We need honesty and real dirty talk. We need people to be able to express their anger in useful ways and channel these energies into change. (para. 10)

I understand “dirty talk” to be politically and emotionally charged dialogue that challenges preconceived notions and understandings of histories and contemporary realities, confronts the intersectionalities of oppression and the dominant systems of privilege that sustain and are sustained by the oppression of others, and reveals the difficult issues of slavery, eugenics, residential schools, and so on that have built the “White Eurocentric Christian Patriarchal Society” (Acoose, 1995). These hard lessons can be balanced with Maternal Essence and Homeplace to encourage students to become “empowered participants” (Yosso, 2005, p. 75) within a nurturing environment and a safe ethical space.

Nixon (2014) also refers to Audre Lorde as an ancestral guide and connects with Lorde’s writing in a similar way that I have connected to the work of Pauline Johnson, who Beth Brant describes as a spiritual grandmother inspiring the work of Indigenous women writers today. Within the connection between the work of scholars who merge Caribbean and African diasporic literature into their feminist praxis in a similar fashion that I merge Indigenous women’s literature as an expression of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, the spiritual and physical elements of Maternal Essence and Homeplace come

to fruition. As Audre Lorde becomes known as an ancestral guide, Pauline Johnson is known too, and as I find Homeplace within Indigenous women's literature, Homeplace is also found within Caribbean and African diasporic literature. Maternal Essence and Homeplace thus go hand in hand, and while Homeplace is "a site of resistance" it is also a safe space for "renewal and self-recovery" (hooks, 2007, p. 272). This balance is necessary as emotionally difficult dialogue can bring empathy, compassion, healing, action, and social change. As Anh Hua (2013) eloquently expressed, writing is thus the intellectual weapon that promotes the possibilities for social change:

In this feminist anti-colonial cultural project, I will explore critical writings by Black diaspora women writers, to understand how language and the narrative world are used as a political tool to generate agency for the subjugated. I am interested in examining how Black diaspora women writers deploy storytelling, critical theorizing, and remembrance practices to comprehend, resist, transform, and heal from patriarchy, racism, colonization, and the history of slavery, to explore uncharted journeys. Writing, language, and the spoken words are creative, political, and intellectual weapons that Black diaspora women use to fight back against their assumed and constructed invisibility, powerlessness, and voicelessness. I argue that far from silent, Black diaspora women have spoken in tongue, drum and chant to create a reality that has yet to exist—a world of egalitarian possibilities. (p. 30)

I believe that in this way Indigenous women's literatures are creating new forms of "community cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2005) for Indigenous women who are not only

coming to a recognition of being (Anderson, 2000) but also extending their newfound cultural knowledge to promote holistic well-being.

Chapter Summary

I began this chapter by drawing attention to the lessons that Sky Woman continues to pass on to future generations of Indigenous women. These are the very lessons that the participants have brought and come to know throughout their experiences in the courses. Following the legacy of Sky Woman and the many Indigenous women who have cleared a path of empowerment and renewal, the participants have carried these lessons forward inspiring new generations as they contribute to holistic well-being and community strength. In doing so, they have revisited lessons of the past to understand contemporary realities and envision a healthy future. The lessons of the sweetgrass baskets are a testament to the living connection between theory and practice that is integral to Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. To come full circle, I ask the reader to revisit the quotation shared in the interchapter Pedagogical Lessons of the Sweetgrass Teachings:

Sweetgrass is a link to remembering our past and a process of recovery. The tall, fragrant grasses which are picked and cured at the height of summer in preparation for the burning, the soothing, the healing; the rituals which acknowledge and affirm the past while bringing forth a newly found integrity, focus and clarity. Encoded in these baskets is history not just of basket making but of a way of life. Reclaiming, recovering and honouring the work and knowledge of these grandmothers is at the core of this effort. (Baird, Excerpt from “Memory Claim” cited in B. Brant & Laronde, 1996, p. 4)

As the women have metaphorically gathered sweetgrass throughout the courses, braided lessons that have prompted their own work to resist, reclaim, construct, and act (Anderson, 2000), and gathered medicines to bring back to their families and communities, they have also brought forth integrity, focus, and clarity in the spirit of holistic well-being. Indeed, this study showcases the lesson that “sweetgrass is all around her,” providing opportunities for Indigenous women to learn from the cultural teachings that are embedded within Indigenous worldviews, maternal teachings, and cultural traditions. This study is a starting place for conceptualizing reconciliation through the lessons of the sweetgrass baskets. Thus, I offer a concluding chapter that advances these lessons to inspire educational journeys for all learners, educators, and scholars. Chapter 8 extends Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy to all students, educators, and scholars and includes a section that aligns this teaching praxis with the TRC’s (2016) Calls to Action in the spirit of advancing safe homeplaces for all to become involved in reconciliation.

CHAPTER 8: AN EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY TOWARD RECONCILIATION

It is *only* through my culture that my woman's identity is shaped. It is the teachings of my people that demand we speak from our own personal experience.

(Monture-Angus, 1995, p. 29)

To bring this research full circle I revisit the above words written by the late Patricia Monture-Angus who was one of my first inspirations as an emerging Indigenous scholar. The cultural and maternal teachings embedded in her writing have indeed shaped my understanding of my own cultural and scholarly identity. Her words also connect me to my woman's identity and have provided the will for me to honour my connections as a *Yakonkwehón:we* (Mohawk woman) and *Ista* (Mother) of two children. My journey toward the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy began with the personal identity development work that has fostered my growth as an Indigenous scholar. Anderson (2000) offers an important lesson that accompanies her cultural identity development theory; that the resist, reclaim, construct, and act, is an ongoing and continual process. I have and will continue to journey through the four components in my personal life, my community involvement, my academic work, and my teaching, all of which are inseparable and only understood through my identity as a *Yakonkwehón:we* (Mohawk woman) and *Ista* (Mother) of two children. This is the starting place that is infused throughout my praxis. My intention is to encourage students to embrace their starting places and honour their identities and to offer a safe Homeplace for all learners.

What follows is a lesson plan that I offer for educators to showcase Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy in relation to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Calls to Action. As I point out, reconciliation involves everyone. Thus, I present

the lesson plan as a gift from my own sweetgrass basket and encourage all educators to move forward in the spirit of truth and reconciliation. I end with a final reflection and offer this research as my starting place on the path that I have followed. Along the way, I have gathered seeds from the Indigenous academics who have cleared a path. I have followed, planting new seeds and expressing my own “flowering growth” (B. Brant, 1997) as an Indigenous academic. The circle is continuous and as we carve out space for Indigenous ways of being in academia, new pathways will undoubtedly emerge.

The findings showcase the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and the effect it has on building student capacity in the areas of cultural identity development, holistic well-being, academic success, and community engagement. Although this research focused on the experiences of Indigenous women who have taken the three courses where I have delivered Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy, the curriculum is relevant for all learners. In future research, I will look at the effect my teaching approach has on “building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect” (TRC, 2016, 63iii) for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike. This is important because the TRC Calls to Action will lead more and more students to be exposed to Indigenous studies courses and it is critically important to consider who is qualified to teach the courses and how they will be taught. As recent examples have demonstrated, there is an immediate need to “train the trainer” as institutions collectively work to incorporate Indigenous curriculum at all levels. Moreover, aligning with the TRC’s Calls to Action involves moving beyond pan-Indianism approaches to the “dirty talk” (Nixon, 2014) or emotionally charged dialogue that troubles systems of oppression.

Although this dissertation has largely focused on the connection between cultural identity and well-being, it is important to also consider the role of anti-racist education, and, in doing so, to consider the telling of uncomfortable stories within ethical and safe spaces. Verna St. Denis (2007) asserts that anti-racist education involves moving beyond cultural identity to include racial identity. As she points out, it is important to understand racial identity and the processes of racialization because it helps bring understanding to the way “race has been used and is continually used to justify inequality and oppression” (p. 1071). Her article, published 10 years ago, calls “for the widespread offering of a critical anti-racist education as a requirement at all universities across Canada” because Indigenous peoples are far too often called to the task of challenging “deeply entrenched racist ideology without the time and resources to adequately do so” (p. 1083). Her call to Canadian universities is echoed in the Truth and Reconciliation’s aforementioned Calls to Action that not only focus on intercultural understandings but also anti-racist education. For St. Denis, a focus on cultural revitalization, without anti-racist education tends to blame Indigenous peoples for their own loss of language and cultural identity rather than trouble the colonial processes and racialized legislations that continually justify the ongoing oppression and inequality of Indigenous peoples. Moreover, by only focusing on cultural revitalization, sole responsibility is placed on Indigenous people while ignoring the role non-Indigenous people play in the ongoing colonization that permeates all facets of Canadian society, especially education. Thus, Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy specifically, and culturally relevant education generally, must work alongside anti-racist education, and anti-racist education should not be left out of mandatory Indigenous studies courses for all university students.

Applying Sweetgrass Lessons to Truth and Reconciliation

As I have worked to define and refine my praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and express the value this teaching and learning engagement holds for Indigenous women, I will continue to carry my sweetgrass basket and apply lessons in an attempt to reach the hearts and minds of all learners. In the final section, I extend the TRC's (2016) Calls to Action to Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a transformative learning experience for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women and men that can simultaneously work as anti-racist and emancipatory education. Thus, Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy—by way of promoting cultural identity through Indigenous literatures—is simultaneously empowering and emancipatory. It is empowering and emancipatory in its ability to serve as a call to action that moves Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners spiritually, physically, intellectually, and emotionally. Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy moves learners spiritually through connections with Maternal Essence; physically through connections with community involvement, activism, and advocacy work; intellectually through presentations and publications and continued academic work; and emotionally by connecting heart and spirit through understandings of Homeplace. It is empowering for Indigenous learners who are finding voice, purpose, and a stronger sense of self and using that voice to contribute to community well-being. As I move forward and extend this work beyond this study, I will look to document the ways that Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy can be emancipatory for non-Indigenous learners by moving them to action as well. Thus, in the next section I will draw on the TRC's Calls to Action and highlight a lesson plan for all learners.

Several of the TRC's Calls to Action are addressed directly to postsecondary educational institutions. For example, calls 16, 24, and 63 refer to the need for the following changes in postsecondary programs for Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners:

- (a) expanding Aboriginal language programs (call 16);
- (b) incorporating Indigenous teachings and content related to residential schools, treaties, and Indigenous rights (call 24);
- (c) building students' intercultural competency, conflict resolution skills, and commitments to human rights and anti-racism (call 24); and
- (d) enhancing students' capacity for intercultural understandings, empathy, and mutual respect (call 63).

Some universities across Canada have taken a lead on acknowledging the calls that are directly related to postsecondary education and implementing action. For example, Queen's University has established a Truth and Reconciliation Task Force, the University of Saskatchewan hosted a forum "Building Reconciliation: Universities Answering the TRC's Calls to Action," and Lakehead University and the University of Winnipeg have established mandatory courses in Indigenous Studies for all undergraduate students. Although much work still needs to be done at Brock University in response to the Calls to Action, the Introduction to Indigenous Studies course has recently been approved as a non-mandatory context credit open to all students. I have recently started teaching this course with the wider student population. I share the following lesson plan that can be seen as a gift from my sweetgrass basket. This research is a small piece of a larger puzzle and in a sense, is a gift that I can extend from my

sweetgrass basket to the baskets of educators who will take on the tasks of incorporating Indigenous studies into their classrooms.

Lesson Plan—Reconciliation Involves Everyone

This lesson plan takes place early in the introduction to Indigenous Studies course in week 3 or 4 after initial discussions about Turtle Island (i.e., North America) before and after contact. I have covered material that discusses the doctrine of discovery and the doctrine of terra nullius (Stannard, 1992) so the students have an understanding of the decimation of the original population of Indigenous peoples before contact, cultural warfare, the spread of infectious diseases, and the religious indoctrination that was used to explain illness and death as the “will of God.” The students have an opportunity to understand what was happening before the introduction of the Indian Act of Canada and before the residential school system. This is important because what is often taught about colonization is only the tip of the iceberg. There are many layers that are not covered and I believe all of these layers need to be revealed before we can truly talk about reconciliation.

Students are asked to read the introduction and Chapter 1 of *Historic Trauma and Aboriginal Healing* (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). Because this material is emotionally difficult, the class activity is presented as an inviting exercise that opens up a safe space for dialogue and allows everyone in the class to contribute to a vision of reconciliation. Colonization, then, is no longer something outside the realm of the student experience but rather through an understanding of ongoing colonization, all students—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—are prompted to consider their roles in decolonization and reconciliation.

Before we begin the class activity, I present information from Anderson and Ball's (2011) "Foundations: First Nation and Métis Families" and the lessons that this reading presents from Maria Campbell. Anderson and Ball present the Cree understanding of *Wahkohtowin*, a Cree word that can be defined as kinship relative, relationships, or the act of being related to each other and all things in creation. They then describe the dismantling of Indigenous families through colonization by describing "The Shattering of Wahkohtowin." In the article, the authors write about a conversation with Elder Maria Campbell who shared her teaching of the shattering of Wahkohtowin as described to her by Elder Peter O'Chiese who described colonization as "someone dropping a complex and snugly fitting puzzle, causing it to shatter into a million pieces. This shattered puzzle evokes the impact of settler intrusion into the worlds of Indigenous peoples" (p. 99). Anderson and Ball noted that "decolonization can thus be seen as the process of bringing those scattered pieces back together to rebuild Indigenous peoples and worlds and make them whole again" (p. 99).

I ask the students to consider all of the points of contact that were involved in the act of shattering the puzzle into a million pieces. Students are asked to consider how far some of those puzzle pieces went by drawing on examples from residential schools where children were often sent to school located far away from their home communities, or the Sixties Scoop where Indigenous children were adopted and placed in non-Indigenous families in other communities. I tell students that some of these children were sent away as far as Australia and New Zealand. One of the students who I taught last year had recently returned from New Zealand after finding her family in Canada through social media.

Next, I share teachings from Maria Campbell that extend the puzzle metaphor to the notion of “Rebuilding the Foundation.” In another article entitled “Indigenous Midwifery as an Expression of Sovereignty” (Tabobondung, Wolfe, Smylie, Senese, & Blais, 2014), Campbell noted:

We all carry a piece of the puzzle—if we come together, we can piece back the puzzle that was scattered by colonization. There is no such thing as no culture, story, language—it’s not lost—it’s out there and everyone has a piece of it. (p. 73)

Storytelling is the medicine we need now—What will help us through are the stories that we will say to each other. Even if you feel you have no story or culture, you do have a piece of it. Don’t believe that your story is not important—it does not matter what kind of story it is. We need it—it’s a little medicine that comes out. (p. 81)

After sharing the above teachings, I revisit the chapter from *The Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series. Chapter 1: Historical Background* (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004) where it is noted that “This trauma is only beginning to be understood as Indigenous peoples across the continent participate in a massive healing movement (p. 24). I hand out a full letter-size paper with an image of a blank puzzle piece to each student and give them some time to reflect on the following two questions and consider how the puzzle can be put back together:

1. What is involved in this massive healing movement?
2. How can Indigenous and non-Indigenous people come together in this healing movement?

As the students are reflecting, we watch two related video clips. The first video showcases an interview with Wahneek Hornmiller who shares her experience with the historical land claim dispute known as the Oka Crisis (The National, 2015). This video offers important background for discussion around more contemporary situations such as the current standoff at Standing Rock North Dakota. The students also view a video of Lee Maracle's reading of her poem "Blind Justice" to prompt further reflection on colonization and reconciliation (Dueck, 2014).

I ask students to return with the puzzle pieces the following class by filling them in with a response to the aforementioned two questions. This assignment serves as their journal for that week. The following class I facilitate a discussion by requesting that all students share their responses. This is a really powerful exercise as it gets everyone involved in the dialogue and students consider their role in carrying a piece of the puzzle and collectively fitting the pieces back together. During the discussion, to the extent the metaphor of colonization being akin to a tightly fit puzzle shattered into a million pieces, I ask students if the puzzle—or Indigenous families, communities, cultures, and lifeways—would ever be the same as they were prior to colonization. I also ask the students to consider the process of bringing all the pieces back together and what that means for a future built on reconciliation. The sentence or two that I had asked of students ended up being entire puzzle pieces filled with ideas about reconciliation. I was amazed at what the students had come back with as everyone presented different elements of a collective vision. To provide examples, some noted the importance of Indigenous peoples having opportunities to reclaim their cultural practices and ceremonies such as drumming and singing, smudging and attending a sweat lodge. Others

focused on the importance of education and mandatory Indigenous studies courses. One student noted the importance of reconciliation activities such as the Kairos Blanket Exercise, which is an interactive activity that helps promotes empathy and compassion and helps people to understand the historical and contemporary relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples by revealing hard lessons about historical and contemporary colonization (Kairos Canada, 2017). Through the lesson, all students in the course are prompted to consider the piece of the puzzle they carry in promoting reconciliation. I am hopeful that these lessons will be carried with them well beyond the course.

Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy as a Response to the TRC's Calls to Action

I noted above that my pedagogical approach aligns with the TRC's (2016) Calls to Action. Indeed, through the lesson plan described above and other class activities I am working to "advance the processes of reconciliation by promoting culturally appropriate curricula" (10iii) for "building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect" (63iii). Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy provides a safe space for dialogue on contemporary issues such as Missing and Murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada and the current suicide epidemics in Northern communities. Through classroom conversations and activities, national responses to these issues will be troubled and participants will be prompted to reflect on their own worldviews and consider issues of power and privilege. This work is intended to inspire compassion and empathy through transformative and cross-cultural understandings that encourage all to become part of an informed dialogue as we advance equity, justice, and action.

Final Reflection

In my sweetgrass basket, I have placed Grandmother Shirley's words "When the light bulb goes on and you can't turn it off. You can't go back, you can only go forward." I carry her words as I move forward with this work. Yet, as she noted, this knowledge can be "a little bit daunting at times too." This has indeed been my experience as I have faced numerous obstacles throughout my own journey in bringing this research together. I have come to know this as part of my own intellectual growth as I consider the creation of the sweetgrass baskets, and the gathering of medicines that are carried in the baskets. I am reminded of the lessons of patience and persistence as I have been faced with significant challenges within my own journey through the development of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and Indigenous Maternal Methodology. Is the sweetgrass too wet or too dry? Has it been a poor harvest? Is there misalignment in the weaving? Despite these challenges, it is indeed the Maternal Essence and the affirming movements that push me to keep going forward. The wisdom of the Grandmothers has been a gift, and as they guide me, I continue to humbly follow their path and continue to clear a way forward to create spaces for Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy.

I am both humbled and honoured that I have been in a position that provided me the space to do something with this research and not let it "sit on a shelf." This work has been possible as a result of the input and energy of many and has been used to reach the hearts and minds of the students who have completed the Gidayaamin program or the individual courses, the Indigenous and non-Indigenous students who I teach, and all those who have been touched by the rippling effect of empowered participation (Yosso, 2005) and community work that extends classroom lessons.

I now reflect on an affirmation from the Elder who has guided this research. Grandmother Shirley expressed, “You can never convince somebody to do something. They have to come to that on their own journey but they see how your life has changed and you’re beaming. There is a lot of light in this circle.” It is the very light in the circle, the powerful transformation of the women that Grandmother Shirley witnessed, that inspires me to continue this work. Their empowerment is my empowerment and they have helped me to understand my place as an aspiring Indigenous educator and scholar. It is a place that is deeply interconnected to the stories of Indigenous womanhood within the tides and terrains of the landscape of Turtle Island, the vast lands that many now refer to as Canada or North America. Pauline Johnson’s (1892) poetry from “The Song My Paddle Sings” to “A Cry from an Indian Wife” eloquently captures the vastness of these landscapes as experienced by a prominent Indigenous woman at the turn of the 19th century. Johnson’s journey brought her from the Six Nations of the Grand River to Vancouver where she found herself within the Homeplace and richness of the Squamish culture. Through the stories of Pauline Johnson, that are just as relevant today as they were over 100 years ago, and other authors featured in the courses, the participants have found their Homeplaces as well.

It is important to note that my articulation of Indigenous womanhood and maternal theories resists the essentializing of identities. Moreover, my praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy must be understood as an approach that embraces the whole student and the gifts of identity and the stories that they bring to the teaching and learning environment. As it has been expressed, identities are continually shifting and evolving. As students find their Homeplace within my courses and come to their own

recognition of being, I encourage them to continually embrace the changes that may come as they continue their journeys forward.

The women have used their sweetgrass baskets to give back to their families and communities in different ways, including advocacy and activism through community work, authorship, and the organization of women's groups and forums. I have had the opportunity to witness their personal growth and that light that Grandmother Shirley described. I am excited to see the continued rippling effects of the future work and empowered participation (Yosso, 2005) of the women and future students.

To extend the understanding of the rippling effect of an Indigenous women-centred curriculum, I share the following words that I came across as I was working on this chapter. The words appear in the foreword to Kim Anderson's (2011) *Life Stages and Native Women: Memory, Teachings, and Story Medicine*—a book I use in the mothering course. The words are drawn from Maria Campbell's (1973) book, which I assign in the literature course. The overlap between these two works is a compelling example of how interconnected Indigenous women's stories are to our lived realities. Furthermore, Maria Campbell was writing about her own experience of being empowered by Pauline Johnson:

Telling this story reminds me of the enduring power of Johnson's writing, and of the power of stories about women—the singers, the heroes, the fictional and the everyday women that we find in our writing. I'm also reminded of why writing is so important—especially when it is grounded in one's landscape, culture, and history. This is what I think my first book did for many people. They saw themselves, if not in my experience, then for sure in the culture, history, and

landscape. When they wrote to me or told me what reading *Halfbreed* meant to them, I remembered Pauline Johnson and I was humbled. (p. x)

When I read the above words, I reflected on my grandmother whose *Flint and Feather: The Complete Poems of E. Pauline Johnson* (1981) book I treasure today and use in the literature course. The poems published in the poetry book, much like *Sweetgrass Basket* (Carvell, 2005), bring me closer to my grandmother and perhaps this is part of the maternal legacy she has left for me. Pauline Johnson's work has certainly been a gift that shapes my understanding of Maternal Essence. Campbell continued by drawing attention to the empowerment that comes through Indigenous literature:

Today I cannot go into a bookstore and buy all the books written by Native authors, as there are so many. Thousands in fact, and it is those books that have given me strength and inspiration to continue my work. (p. xi)

It is the lessons of the books that connect the hearts and minds of learners and bring emotion into each learner's learning journey. These are the kind of connections that move Indigenous women to become "empowered participants" (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). The women in this study are now contributing to what LaRocque (2009) refers to as an Indigenous intellectual movement by publishing their own work, presenting at public fora, and contributing to community well-being through advocacy and activism. Perhaps this is a contemporary example of women's rites of passage, and in this way their educational journeys, much like mine, have become women's ceremony.

In a recent discussion in my INDG 3P47 *Indigenous Women's Literature Activism and Empowerment* course on Beth Brant's (1994) description of Indigenous women's writing as "recovery writing" against repeated attempts of "cultural annihilation" at the

hands of the “State” (p. 18), one of my non-Indigenous students connected the Cheyenne Proverb “A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground. Then it is done, no matter how brave its warriors or strong its weapons.” As a class, we talked about Indigenous women’s literature serving as a powerful force that lends protection, perhaps spiritual medicines, against violence as it empowers women to return to their cultural identities. In this way, if we are to consider Kim Anderson’s work on life stages, the literature itself can be the starting point for a reader’s own rite of passage to understanding cultural identity and using the empowerment that comes with being culturally grounded as a weapon against colonial violence. It is no coincidence that two of the authors, Maria Campbell and Morningstar Mercredi, whose memoirs I feature in the literature course were also keynote speakers at the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women’s Conference held in Regina, Saskatchewan (Hampton, Kubik, & Anderson, 2008). The issues that Indigenous women write about are the issues that connect all Indigenous women across Turtle Island and through dialogue engage women in drawing from and forming a renewed community cultural wealth that brings us home to empowered selves, families, and communities. Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy has provided a space for the women to gather medicines that empower their participation while protecting them from the need to hide their identities. I have established a safe educational Homeplace where Indigenous women can follow a path toward community well-being and non-Indigenous students can also participate by walking along this path of liberation. I present it as a safe Homeplace for all learners to express their whole-selves and full identities.

Concluding Remarks

The ability to walk in two worlds and move forward on a decolonizing path through academia is a journey of perseverance. It requires me to resist what Battiste (2013) portrayed as an imperialistic system of knowledge that “functions like a ‘keeper’ current in a rapidly flowing river or ocean” (p. 107). Throughout my journey, I have experienced numerous tensions associated with my struggle against this strong and powerful current. The force of this current is evident in Battiste’s description: “The keeper current drags a person to the bottom and then to the top, but if one fights against the current one usually drowns” (p. 107). I resist this “keeper current” through a decolonizing educational journey with a commitment to work towards decolonizing and Indigenizing the educational landscape for others.

I recently attended an information session where a facilitator expressed her academic journey of finding balance between two vastly different worldviews by using the metaphor of walking with one moccasin and one high heel. Her story extends the Haudenosaunee teachings of the Two-Row Wampum treaty and the contradictions of travelling with one foot in the canoe and one in the vessel. These metaphors present the essence of my own decolonizing academic journey. Indigenous scholars and students are faced with many challenges as they strive to find scholarly footing in mainstream academic institutions. Throughout this dissertation, I have highlighted the traces of my footsteps along my decolonizing path and described the ways I have felt grounded by keeping my teaching and research connected to my reality as a *Yakonkwehón:we*. I have been fortunate to gather strength from others who I have had the opportunity to walk with and whose paths I have followed along this journey towards reclaiming myself and

becoming grounded within academic contexts. Empowerment has certainly come from the work of the first and second wave of Indigenous women academics (Archibald, 2009) who relentlessly carved out space for Indigenous ways of being in the academy. The ability to make these scholarly connections along my journey allows me to envision how my work can construct and enact Indigenous ways of being within academic contexts to benefit my community and contribute to a shifting landscape within academia (Kovach, 2009). My journey through the praxis of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and the associated Indigenous Maternal Methodology marks my steps towards a unique area of scholarship. This is a direction that has enabled me to plant healthy seeds for cultural identity and promote Indigenous women's academic success. As I move forward to extend my praxis to all learners in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, I am honoured to be in a position to continue following and clearing a path of Indigenous scholarship.

I have presented this work in honour of the women who participated in this study to refine a vision of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and the work they are doing to contribute to community well-being and the future generations of women who will follow the beautiful sweetgrass road. I will close with the words of Beth Brant (1988) written as the introduction for *A Gathering of Spirit* an edited collection of writing by Indigenous women. May her words be received as a gift that we collectively carry forward in our sweetgrass baskets for her work has allowed many of us to follow a path that has “shaped, moved, or inspired us.”

We started something, sisters. Our testament is out there now, part of the wind, part of people's minds and hearts. *We have always been here. We will always be here.* (p. 13)

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APPENDIX A: Sharing Circle Discussion Guide

Traditional Opening

The Elder will provide a traditional opening as per cultural protocol. This will involve the use of traditional medicine through a smudging ceremony to offer thanks and to bring a good mind to the Sharing Circle.

My Introduction and Description of the Study

As a student who has completed one of my courses I invite you to contribute to my personal and academic journey that will explore my unique teaching practice of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy. My goal is to explore the value of Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy by looking at how the course delivery honours and embraces Indigenous women's identities and roles as mothers, students, and community members. I am also interested in the connection between Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy and cultural identity development, holistic well-being, academic success, and community engagement, for Indigenous women students. I am also looking for your suggestions for improving and further developing Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy to meet the educational desires of Indigenous women. Your input in the research will also provide an opportunity for you to share your own opinions of the course design and delivery and offer suggestions for improvements.

The findings from this study will be used to support my dissertation and may be used in future publications related to my research on Indigenous women's educational experiences. Your contributions will also help to provide a better understanding of the role of Indigenous and maternal based curriculum. It is my hope to continue developing my teaching practice in a way that honours the educational realities and desires of Indigenous women from our community. Your participation will support my work as I strive to offer courses that contribute to the academic success of Aboriginal women. This knowledge will be used to continue developing programming that is culturally relevant and connected to Indigenous communities.

Key Definitions

Cultural Identity Development

My understanding of cultural identity development for Aboriginal women is supported by the work of Anderson (2000) on the cultural identity formation of Aboriginal women as well as my own personal experiences. Anderson presents her theory of identity formation within the framework of a Medicine Wheel that includes four components: Resist, Reclaim, Construct, and Act. Anderson describes this process as “resisting negative definitions of being; reclaiming Aboriginal tradition; constructing a positive identity by translating tradition into the contemporary context; and acting on that identity in a way that nourishes the overall well-being of our communities” (p. 15). Anderson's theoretical model offers a solid foundation that will shape my approach to mapping out the cultural identity development of participants in this proposed research. To deepen my

understanding of cultural identity theory as it applies to Aboriginal learners I have also familiarized myself with the work of other Indigenous scholars in this area. Wilson (2004), Horse (2005, 2012), Lawrence (2003), Fiske (2006), and Young (2005).

Cultural identity development for Indigenous women is a continual process that is shaped by the complexities of colonization and decolonization. Individual experiences of cultural identity development are unique but may share many commonalities. This research lends an opportunity for the participants to contribute to an evolving understanding of cultural identity development within the context of teaching and learning through Indigenous women-centred curriculum.

Academic Success

Although academic success is generally defined by academic achievement and associated with high marks, alternative definitions of academic success for Indigenous women include a balance of academic achievement with the attainment of one's educational goals and aspirations.

Holistic Well-Being

I define well-being through a holistic understanding that includes balancing the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual components of self and also considers mainstream definitions of well-being that emphasize educational attainment and economic sufficiency. My sense of well-being is informed by the Anishnaabee principle of Mino-biimaadiziwinan, which is a belief in living "the good life" through a good mind and achieving a harmonious balance of the mind, body, and spirit (Anderson, 2005; Newhouse & FitzMaurice, 2012). From a Haudenosaunee perspective, this understanding is also encouraged through Ka'nikonhrí:yo, which teaches us to bring a "good mind" to all that we do.

I draw on Wilson (2004), whose research on Aboriginal women's cultural identity and wellness advances a holistic understanding that connects individual, family, and community well-being. According to Wilson, community wellness starts in the home with personal well-being, and then extends to relationships with others and to behaviours, and is also rooted within connections to cultural traditions. It is also important to understand that "well-being ripples from and through self...family...extended family...community...nation" (Wilson, 2004, p. 20), such that personal well-being extends to communal well-being and, at the same time, there is a reciprocal relationship whereby communal well-being affects personal well-being.

Community Engagement

Community engagement refers to how involved women are with the Aboriginal community and in what ways (locally, nationally, globally) or through participation in events, advocacy, activism, and other connections.

Indigenous Maternal Pedagogy

Indigenous maternal pedagogy connects maternal pedagogy with women-centred Indigenous epistemologies that embrace the “whole student” within educational contexts. This unique pedagogical approach promotes the cultural identity development of students, encourages ethical dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners, and also fosters agency, advocacy, and activism through shared Indigenous maternal teachings.

The audio-recorder will now be turned on and I will begin the guided discussion.

Questions:

1. Student Introductions. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and what brought you to university and the program you are enrolled in?
2. What were your initial educational aspirations upon applying to university and have those changed? Reflect on what inspires and motivates you as a student.
3. Can you please state which of the following courses you completed and share a bit about your overall experience in the course(s):

ABST 2P17 Reclaiming Aboriginal Women’s Literary Traditions and Educational Aspirations

ABST 3P47 Aboriginal Women’s Literature: Activism and Empowerment

ABST 3P80 Aboriginal Mothering and Motherhood: Historical and Contemporary Realities

4. Can you recall and explain the significance of a specific reading, course discussion, or assignment that you found particularly meaningful?
5. Please describe your experience in the course(s) in relation to your vision of academic success? If applicable, please differentiate your experience from other courses you have taken.
6. Please describe the influence the course(s) had on your holistic well-being.
7. Did the course delivery, Kim Anderson’s theory of identity formation, or materials (readings, discussions, videos, invited speakers) contribute to your understanding of Indigenous women’s identities and experiences? Has this shaped your own cultural identity development and, if so, in what ways?
8. How has your experience in the course(s) influenced your understanding of yourself in relation to your role(s) as an Indigenous student, a mother, and/or a community member?

9. Has the course(s) shaped or confirmed your understanding of Indigenous family and community well-being? If so please explain?
10. a) Can you share a bit about your involvement with Indigenous communities and describe if the course(s) shaped your involvement with the communities in any way?

b) Prompt: Has the course(s) shaped your involvement in activism and advocacy within Indigenous communities. This can include movements such as Idle No More or the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) awareness campaign.
11. What improvements can be made to the course, course material, and course delivery to align with your desired visions of Indigenous women's education?
12. Is there anything that you would like to add that you feel would contribute to the delivery of the course(s) or any final thoughts that you would like to share?

APPENDIX B: Initial Themes Prepared for Feedback Circle

Cultural identity

- Lack of cultural identity prior to course
- Journey of discovery
- Discovered what it means to be an Indigenous woman
- An expressed desire to learn more about culture

Questioning life plan (before Gidayaamin program)

Empowering Journey (experience of program or courses)

Transformative

- Personal development personal growth
- Self-worth
- Development of confidence
- Feeling worthy of contributing to society
- Voice: finding voice; using voice; responsibility to use voice

Intellectual ability

- Coming to know intellectual strength
- Becoming aware of one's own knowledge
- The value of one's ideas and thought processes

Emotional intelligence

- Learning how to talk about difficult issues
- Working through emotionally charged literature
- Healthy self-expression

Community classroom

- Described the class as a sharing circle: safe to share and feel vulnerable; trust in the class as a circle
- Safe space: first time sharing/vulnerability
- Shared learning: learning exchange, learning from one another
- Feeling of acceptance in Gidayaamin program; support system

Meaningful learning

- Personal connection as an educational drive
- Personal investment in learning
- Feeling a part of the learning journey
- Personal connections: meaningful; connecting to spirit

Advocacy

- Applying to other courses
- Responsibility to write about Aboriginal issues in other courses
- Desire to make change
- Brought book to another professor; Advocacy work; ripple effect

Sweetgrass basket

- Carrying the teachings within
- Medicine bundle or sweetgrass basket

Family well-being

- Centering children
- Encouraged family to take program
- To be a role model for children
- Evidence of family healing through program
- Holistic well-being and connection to spirit

Teachings from the Elder

- Healing process
- Living those values
- Decolonization as a long journey

Course lessons

- What colonization means
- Understanding intergenerational trauma
- Moved past self-worth and self-doubt still rebuilding and reconstructing
- Importance of honouring yourself first

Literature course

- Discovering the power of words
- Empowered by the literature
- Importance of Native women's stories
- Finding voice through the stories

Review of the gifts for the sweetgrass basket/medicine bundle/toolkit:

Prompt: What else is needed?

Other keypoints noted:

- The need to restore balance; the importance of Indigenous men's literature
- Importance of bringing in Knowledge Keepers